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MARGARET JERMINE

BY

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MARGARET JERMINE.

CHAPTER I.

It was May-day. The sky was blue. The green upon the trees was tender. The earth was carpeted with primroses. Cowslips and bluebells filled the air with fragrance. Blackbirds whistled gaily, and thrushes warbled joyously. All was bright, excepting the long black procession which was winding through the woods that crept down to the banks of Ule Mere. The house from which it had emerged—the great Elizabethan mansion of the Jermines—stood in the sunlight like a tenement of the dead, silent, blind, its shutters closed, its occupants absent. The large building contained but two human beings—an infant of five days old and its nurse. The woman stood at the window, looking furtively behind the blind, while the procession filed out of the house. When it had disappeared into the wood, she turned and looked at the slumbering infant. She was not a vulgar woman, and she was kindly, and the acquaintance of many babes had not blunted her innate motherliness. Her eyes were moist as she regarded the cradle.

‘Poor little one!’ she murmured. ‘I wonder what will become of you; I would have saved your mother, if I could.’

From afar came the sound of a single bell tolling sadly. Carlo, the great house-dog, sat on his haunches at the entrance-hall and howled dismally, and little Tasso, the pet spaniel, whined dolefully outside the door of an empty morning-room. But no sound disturbed the unconscious infant. She slept peacefully, unaware that her young mother

was being carried to her burial, unaware that the sun of her young father's life had gone down, unaware that life was perplexed and the world full of sorrow—she was but five days old.

Five days before the young mistress of Ule had been living—smiling, radiant, anticipating a future so fair and bright that its gladness should transcend the gladness of the bright fair past. In the morning the beautiful young woman of twenty-one had met her husband's kiss and returned it.

'Oh, dearest, how lovely life is!' she had said, as he gave her a bunch of primroses.

Then her hour of peril had come, and in the evening the babe was born and the mother was numbered with the dead.

And Charles Jermine, the widower, was but twenty-five.

There was a great mere at Ule, half-covered in the summer with water-lilies, and in its midst there was an islet, and upon the islet stood two edifices—a little church that held a couple of score of people, and a cottage that had once been a priest's house, but which had long been untenanted. Ule Mere was a rectory without a cure of souls. But the rector of Gladestreet held a service there twice a year, and there for generations the Jermines had brought their children to be baptised,—there their daughters had been wed,—and there they had taken their dead to be laid in the stately crypt beneath the altar. Jermine's young wife had visited the crypt once and had shivered.

'Don't put me here when I die, Charlie darling,' she had said, clasping her hands round her husband's arm; 'I know I'm foolish, but I have a feeling I shouldn't like to lie here in this cold, gloomy place. Let me be in the open air, with flowers growing above me!'

'My dearest, what a gruesome thing to think of! Pray don't talk of dying! I can't bear it,' Jermine had remonstrated. 'We will die together—when we are very old people—like Philemon and Baucis.'

'That would be very good,' the young wife had said. 'But if I *should* die before you, Charlie, you won't forget what I said, will you, dear? Look here,' she had added, drawing him out into the sunlit churchyard, 'I should like to lie here—just here, where I can see the chimneys of home. Do you see? Will you remember?'

'If I have cause to remember, which Heaven forbid, I will,' the young man had promised.

And he had led his bride away and rowed her back across the lake, and had forgotten that parting treads on the heel of welcome, and that Death is man's master.

They had been married in the early spring, and it was April when Jermine brought his young wife to Ule. There they had abode for a year in poetic bliss. They were always together. The soul of each lay bare to the other. What one spoke, the other was already thinking. It seemed that these two were one, and indivisible.

'Nothing can ever come between us,' Jermine would say.

They had been feted, too, by their neighbours. Jermine of Ule was a leading man in Gladeshire, and his lovely young wife had won all hearts. The Homers, the Hathes, the Whebles, the Cleves, the Ingrains, the Ifes, Dryad of Outwoods, and St. Roque of Beaulieu, and above all, the young Bartropps of Bartropps, only a few years married, and with a son and heir running beside them, had all bidden the Jermines welcome, and had made feasts in their honour. The handsome young couple had gone hither and thither, and had been the chief actors at every social gathering. They had enjoyed being entertained. What, indeed, comes amiss to young and happy creatures? But their chief happiness was at home—they twain in their dual solitude. Every moment of life was sweet to them. But this was sweetest of all. When the winter came, young Mrs. Jermine had withdrawn herself a little from society. In the summer, she and her husband decided, they would return all the hospitalities that had been extended to them. They talked of a ball for the young people, of a magnificent dinner for their elders, of a charming little picnic for a chosen few, of a garden-party for all. Maybe they, like the Bartropps, would have a son and heir then, to be exhibited by a happy young mother, and smiled upon by a proud father. And then, in a moment, all these plans and projects were annihilated. Mrs. Jermine had died in giving birth to a daughter, and now her husband was following her to the grave she had chosen in the little island churchyard. A few relatives came after him. Then followed a long train of neighbours. All the gentry of the county had come to show their respect for the dead lady, and their sympathy for the

bereaved husband. Dr. Wheble—who loved the Jermines so well that he had abandoned his London practice and his professional career for the sake of their society—came first, and then Bartropps of Bartropps, whose own doom and his wife's were sealed, and St. Roque of Beaulieu, and Jerminé's college friend, Antonio Pinington, and Homer of Homer Court, and Hathe of Hathe Place, and old Mr. Dryad of Outwoods, and Ife of Red Oaks, and many more, who had been deeply touched by the premature death of Jerminé's young wife. And behind them came the servants and the tenantry. And women, crying bitterly, brought up the rear.

Six men were in readiness to row the coffin to the island, and a steersman stood by. But Jerminé put this man aside, stepped in himself, and took the tiller-ropes. Every one was amazed, for Jerminé had seemed stupefied with grief. But no man interfered.

‘Let him be!’ whispered Wheble to Bartropps. ‘Let him render her the last service!’

The little church was overthronged, and many who had crossed to the island were forced to remain outside. But the western door stood open, and all could see the coffin, covered with primrose-wreaths, and the bowed head of the chief mourner. Many sobbed aloud. Ife of Red Oaks cried like a child. There was a great sound of lamentation as the coffin was carried forth for the last time into the sunshine, and when it was lowered into the grave, it seemed to all men that the scene was blurred and their vision indistinct. Only Jerminé himself shed no tear.

“We give Thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased Thee to deliver this our sister out of the miseries of this sinful world.” Then Jerminé convulsively clasped his hands. It was the only sign of emotion that he gave.

The service was over, and some, who had stood on the outskirts of the throng, drew near and poured more flowers into the grave. Still Jerminé did not move. It seemed as if he had turned into a statue. At last Wheble went up to him and touched his arm.

‘Come back with me, dear fellow,’ he said huskily.

‘Come back!’ repeated Jerminé, looking at his friend, as if he did not understand the meaning of words. But he suffered himself to be led away, and to be rowed across the mere, and he returned to his house and went to his private

room. At the door he turned, and withdrew his hand from Wheble's arm.

'Leave me, Wheble,' he said. 'Come and see me another day. I must be alone now.'

For some days Jerminé refused himself to all comers. No one knew how he employed his time. He sought no proper rest. Perhaps he slept upon the couch in his study. Perhaps his dry and luminous eyes never closed at all.

'Master will go crazy, sir,' said the butler to Wheble, who called constantly.

'Nonsense,' growled the doctor.

But in his heart he was very anxious.

With difficulty the butler induced Jerminé to eat and drink. Speech he could not wring from his master. Did he want aught? Would he see such an one? He merely shook his head, and ordered his questioner from his presence with an imperative gesture. He appeared to be immersed in thought—absorbed in his deep affliction. It seemed to his affectionate servants, listening outside the door, that he paced the room without intermission.

On the fourteenth day the nurse carried the babe into her father's presence. Then, at last, Jerminé was aroused.

'Who desired you to bring that child here?' he demanded sternly.

'It was Dr. Wheble, sir,' stammered the nurse, trembling.

'Is Dr. Wheble here?' asked Jerminé.

'Yes, sir,' replied the woman.

'Then be so kind as to give my compliments to him, and beg him to come to me here,' said Jerminé. 'And take that child out of my sight, and never let me see it again.'

The woman departed, frightened, and in tears.

'He's that unnatchral, he give me quite a turn,' she told the servants.

In a few minutes Wheble entered the study. He was much disappointed that the sight of the infant had not touched the father's heart. Still it was something that Jerminé had sent for him.

The young man held out his hand and bade his friend good-day. Wheble was some years Jerminé's senior. Belonging to a Gladeshire family, he had early quitted his native county and had entered the medical profession. He

was clever, and people said that fame and a brilliant career lay before him. But he had suddenly abandoned his profession, withdrawn from London, and taken a house in the little town of Gladestreet, within an easy distance of Ule. This was at the time of Jermine's marriage, and people had whispered that Dr. Wheble had loved Mrs. Jermine. However that might be, he had been her loved and trusted friend, and more than that, he had been the loved and trusted friend of her husband.

When Wheble entered Jermine's room he perceived at a glance that the widower was marvellously altered. He looked pale and haggard. He had the appearance of having passed through an extremity of bodily suffering. He wore the air, almost of an old man. He held out his hand with the merest greeting, and then signed to his friend to be seated. Wheble had expected to be upbraided, and he felt some astonishment. After a moment he spoke.

'How are you, Jermine?' he said.

'How am I?' replied the other. 'How am I? I am dead.'

'My dear fellow!' ejaculated Wheble.

'I am dead,' reiterated Jermine. 'When a man has loved and married, Wheble, and when he has lost his wife, that man's life is quenched. The machinery of existence may go on because it has been wound up and it cannot stop, but the *man* is dead. Nay—don't contradict me—I mean what I say. The original, natural man is no more. A new man has replaced him, a wiser man, a self-contained man, a man who cannot be hurt.'

'What?' cried Wheble.

Jermine smiled.

'I am glad to see you, Wheble,' he said. 'I should like to tell you the result of this fortnight's meditations. Can you listen?'

Wheble bent his head.

'I have been formulating a philosophy—a rational philosophy,' proceeded Jermine. 'It does not deal with impossibilities. It has nothing to do with the beginnings and the ends of things. It deals only with facts—the palpable facts which lie before us.'

As Jermine spoke Wheble regarded him with increasing amazement. He had come to offer sympathy to a broken-

hearted man. He had prepared himself to soothe the wildness, or to arouse the stupor, of a great grief. He found himself called upon to listen to a system of philosophy. For a moment he wondered whether grief had unhinged Jermine's mind. But there was no appearance of insanity about the bereaved man. His eyes were clear and calm; his voice was steady; his manner collected. He looked like a man who had been studying profoundly, but not like one whose brain was strained or excited.

'My philosophy is a philosophy that every one can understand,' continued Jermine. 'It has nothing to do with the reasons of this or that. I do not ask what human consciousness is, or question its existence. I do not inquire whether man acts from necessity, or whether his will is free. I leave those problems to be disputed by such as find a charm in hair-splitting. Some men take a delight in terms. They like to call common things by uncommon names. It is a joy to them to make the ordinary affairs of life appear phenomenal. With me it is otherwise. I do not care to know how the human race sprang into existence. It is sufficient for me that it is here. It is nothing to me whether our feelings are, or whether they only seem to be. To me, and to most men, they are—indubitably. My postulate, therefore, is—*Men are what they seem to be*. The corollary is—*Because they are what they are, they suffer*. Do you want to know how I arrive at this?'

'Well!' said Wheble. 'You are very eloquent.'

'Because I have been thinking incessantly for days, and I have almost learned my doctrine by heart,' rejoined Jermine. 'Perhaps you think I am mad, Wheble. If you think so, you are mistaken. I have met an unspeakable grief and struggled with it, and I have come out of the fight a philosopher. I should like to give my philosophy to the world. All will be able to comprehend it. It is as simple as Christianity.'

'Well!' said Wheble again.

'Well!' repeated Jermine. 'Granting that men are what they seem—that is, that they possess mental and bodily activities, that they are open to external influences and impressions, and that they are intensely capable of feeling pleasure and pain—what must be the chief end of their desires and energies? Must it not be to avoid pain and

seek pleasure. In other words, must it not be to secure happiness? Each individual pursues this end in his own way, and according to his idiosyncrasies. Some men find pleasure in athletic exercises, some in the pursuit of art and literature, some in philanthropic schemes, some in enterprise, some in politics, some in religion. But if you investigate carefully, you will perceive that, underlying all these sources of joy, is a love of love. The first human desire, and the greatest, is to love and to be loved. To say that men *are*, is to say that they *love*. And to say that men *love*, is to say that they *suffer*.'

The speaker paused.

'I have always considered suffering to be a constituent part of all living things,' observed Wheble. 'It must be so—unless a race of physical and moral giants shall be at length evolved, and all other races eliminated.'

'True,' said Jerminé. 'I am not disputing the ubiquity or the necessity of suffering. As I said before, my philosophy is practical. I ask no question as to how things are, or why. But I find that man suffers because he loves, and I would endeavour to annihilate his suffering. He must cease to love, if he would cease to suffer.'

'But, my dear Jerminé, how can he cease to love, since you have just implied that love is an inherent part of his nature?' asked Wheble.

'So is the desire for fame and popularity, for ease and pleasure, for luxury, for money, for pomp—so is every kind of self-gratification,' replied Jerminé. 'But as love is the most powerful passion, its gratification brings about the worst evils. It is always a failure. It must be so. The moment a man gives his happiness to another person, he makes it depend on an existence over which he has no control. The fear of separation hangs over him, and when the separation comes, the wretch who has loved knows that he has loved in vain. He has drunk of a poisoned cup.'

'Nay, nay,' cried Wheble. 'He who has loved——'

'You interrupt me,' said Jerminé. 'Man, as I said before, aims at happiness. The creature who has loved, and who has been separated from his beloved, discovers that he has pinned all his happiness to a being subject to change and death. He has passed through a period of enjoyment, truly. But happiness is a condition, and he finds that he

has missed that condition. He finds, moreover, that he has not only missed the condition of happiness, but that he has actually embraced and incorporated into his own being the condition of unhappiness. Having once loved, he can never be happy again without his beloved. He has plunged himself into a condition of permanent unhappiness for the sake of a brief enjoyment.'

'Jermine, if you did not infinitely distress me, you would disgust me beyond measure!' cried Wheble. 'Do you mean to say that you regret your marriage?'

'I did not say so, Wheble. If I implied it, I am sorry. Regret my marriage!' cried the young man, with sudden passion. 'What! regret that the fairest hand in the world was clasped in mine; that the loveliest eyes in creation sought mine alone—that the most matchless creature under the sun was mine, all mine, her soul mine, her heart mine, her conversation mine, her whole being mine, mine entirely, mine only! Regret those exquisite months when we two—she and I—filled the universe! Wheble, if you imagine I regret that, you have never loved.'

'I have never enjoyed love, certainly,' said Wheble drily.

There was a short pause. Then Jermine, who had risen, re-seated himself. He was no longer agitated.

'I do not regret my marriage any more than the man condemned to die regrets his birth,' he said. 'But it pains me to think how many men and women will suffer as I am suffering, simply because they will persist in seeking their happiness in the gratification of this one passion whose object cannot endure.'

'But you can't alter the nature of things,' said Wheble.

'Why not? Mahomet has restrained millions from over-indulgence in eating and drinking. Christianity has led millions to endure persecution and death. All religions and philosophies have taught men to bridle their natural appetites, and deny their natural inclinations. Most have inculcated the sacrifice of desire in order to attain rewards in a future life. But my doctrine offers an immediate reward—here—now—in the only state of which we are actually cognisant. I say—avoid love, because it cannot ensure a condition of happiness. Seek happiness where it can be found, in things which can never be taken from you.'

‘And what may those things be?’ inquired Wheble.

‘Study and scenery,’ replied Jermine.

‘Suppose you become blind?’

‘A blind man who has studied, can think.’

‘Oh!’ ejaculated Wheble.

‘You think me mad, Wheble?’

‘I didn’t say so.’

‘No. But I see that that is what you think.’

‘Then, my dear fellow, possibly your sight follows your knowledge.’

‘Not at all. I am as sane as you are. But I am so unhappy—so miserably and unutterably unhappy—that my soul faints within me to think of the mass of unhappiness the world must contain. Oh, Wheble, you don’t know how I loved her!’

Wheble got up abruptly and walked to the window. The bright weather had departed, and he looked out upon a colourless and dreary landscape. Jermine followed him.

‘You seek refuge, as I shall, in the pleasures of scenery,’ said he, putting his hand within his friend’s arm. ‘Is not this grey-green colouring strangely attractive? The east wind is savage, and the trees bend before it. But they bend gracefully. See that laburnum struggling into life! Its pale, half-opened buds seem to shed a tinge of yellow light upon the cheerless scene. And look beyond at the horizon! What a line of pearly white rests beneath the iron-grey above! It is beautiful. Do you not perceive that scenery changes, but never departs?’

‘You will drive me mad!’ exclaimed Wheble.

‘I hope not.’

‘Why are you talking this humbug, Jermine? Scenery, indeed, and study! Live for your child, man!’

‘My child!’ repeated Jermine. ‘I never wish to see my child again.’

‘What, Jermine?’

‘I tell you, I do not wish ever to see my child again.’

‘You selfish brute!’ cried Wheble.

‘Nay, Wheble, it is as much for her sake as my own. Why should she learn to love a father who must die? I intend that she shall be brought up not to love.’

‘And do you suppose she will love no one because she doesn’t love you?’ asked Wheble.

'I shall do my best that she shall love no one. My scheme of education for her will, I trust, secure real happiness to her, and spare her every pang of separation.'

'If I were not so sorry for you, Jerminé, I should say you were a fool.'

'I don't dispute the fact. My philosophy teaches me that most men are fools. It also teaches me,' Jerminé added, with a slight smile, 'that he who is dubbed a fool to-day is often saluted as a leader to-morrow.'

'My dear fellow, come abroad with me,' said Wheble. 'I'm going to travel. You come too, and get these cobwebs out of your brain.'

'Then you still think me mad, Wheble?'

'I think your reasoning faculty is for the moment upset, Jerminé.'

'On the contrary, Wheble, I was never more intellectually clear in my life.'

'Possibly. But, my good fellow, the understanding is not all. We are complex organisms, and if we cultivate one part of our machinery to the exclusion of the rest the *tout ensemble* suffers. The springs we exercise may work with extraordinary activity, but their proper progress is impeded by the unused wheels. They move, but not in a straight line, and if you don't set the other parts in motion, the divergence will become greater and greater, until it ends in an absolute misapprehension of things, which we doctors call mania. It is folly to cultivate the understanding, and starve the affections. My dear Jerminé, be warned in time.'

'I shall not become a maniac, Wheble. I shall not cease to study the affections, I sha'n't indulge them. That is the only difference.'

'The only difference!' cried Wheble, angrily. 'You idiot, of what avail is food, if you study it and don't eat it?'

'None. But we are speaking of the affections.'

'And don't the affections want food? Doesn't every part of us want food?'

'Not if the nourishing of that part of us leads to deadly consequences. It is better to pluck out the right eye than to suffer torments.'

'Tch! I tell you, Jerminé, true philosophy bids you use every power Nature has given you. And if you are so

unlucky as to meet with pain and sorrow, bear it like a man.'

'But why run the risk of meeting pain and sorrow, Wheble? I own I can't face the idea of another separation. That is why I refuse to entertain any personal feeling for the child up stairs. I care for her. I will not love her.'

'You are setting aside the intensest joys.'

'That is what I wish. It is the indulging in joys that has killed me.'

'But the child——'

'The child shall cultivate happiness. She shall be self-contained, and it shall be in no one's power to cause her sorrow. According to my philosophy——'

'Your philosophy is utterly impracticable, Jermine.'

'It is practical, my dear Wheble.'

'I deny it. Who will embrace it?'

'Any and every wise man.'

'I thought you said just now that all men were fools.'

'*Most* men,' corrected Jermine, politely. 'They may become wiser. The great bitterness of love is so common that all men must recognise the truth of my proposition.'

The two polemics were only arguing in a circle, and at last Wheble said so.

'It is of no good my staying here,' he said, 'I will come again to-morrow.'

But he came on the morrow, and day after day, and could not shake his friend's new view of life. After some months, Jermine began writing a treatise, entitled, *The Fallacy of Love: a New Philosophy*. Wheble was dismayed. He warned his friend that he was abandoning himself to the mastery of an insane idea. Jermine only smiled.

'I am not mad,' he said. 'You cannot accuse me of performing mad actions. I have resumed all my public duties. I look after my tenants. If I don't go much into society, what of that? I am a philosopher, and philosophers are wont to live quietly. Surely my retired life does not bespeak madness?'

'No. But your neglect of your child does,' said Wheble, bluntly.

'The child is not neglected,' asserted Jermine; 'I have

planned a scheme of education for her, and I shall myself interview every one who has the care of her.'

Whereat Wheble went away in wrath, vowing that he would never return. Nevertheless, he stayed at Gladestreet for a year, and did all in his power to restore equilibrium to his friend's mind. But he could not divest Jermine of his one idea, and at last he gave up the attempt in despair.

'Time may bring the poor fellow round,' he said. 'I can do no more.'

And he shut up his house, and started on his travels, leaving Jermine to write his treatise on the fallacy of love undisturbed.

Meanwhile, the motherless babe up stairs grew and flourished.

CHAPTER II.

‘Now, Miss Margaret, where ever have you been? You’re a very naughty little girl, and your pa won’t never love you!’

The speaker was a tall elderly woman, with an unsympathetic countenance. The person addressed was a little girl of eight years old. Her face was hot and flushed. Her long hair hung about her in disorder. Her print dress was crumpled. An unmistakable stable-odour clung about her.

‘Where ever have you been?’ repeated the woman.

‘I’ve been riding the new pony,’ replied the child.

She spoke defiantly. A sense of power seemed to lurk in the corners of her pretty mouth. A faint gleam of triumph seemed to shine in her beautiful eyes.

‘You’re a very naughty little girl, and your pa won’t never love you,’ reiterated the woman. ‘You’ve never been and gone with Bensley again, Miss Margaret, have you?’

‘Yes, I have,’ replied the little girl sturdily.

‘Then won’t I just tell your pa, Miss Margaret?’ cried the attendant. ‘How dared you go and do it? You’re a very naughty little girl!’

‘Oh, blow, Mitchell! Can’t you say something fresh?’ said little Margaret.

‘Good gracious, Miss Margaret, and what next, I should like to know. You’re a——’

‘Oh, bother you, Mitchell! Let me go and do my imposition!’

‘Well, Miss Margaret, and who’s hindering you, if I might be allowed to ask? Go along, do, and don’t let me catch you out of the schoolroom again! What’d Mr. Pinington say, and Miss Velvetine, I should like to know?’

'Well, I can easily tell you, Mitchell,' said Margaret. 'Old Pin would say nothing, and Velvetine would——.'

'Now don't you be pert, Miss Margaret!' interrupted Mitchell. 'Just you run along, and don't let me catch the sight of your face again till tea-time. I'll just tell your pa, that I will.'

'Shall you, Mitchell?' said the child.

'Yes, Miss Margaret, that I shall, and you'll perhaps laugh on the wrong side of your mouth when he sends a message to say you're to be well whipped. You're a naughty girl, and you're poor pa won't never love you.'

'Oh, hang you, Mitchell!' cried the child, stamping her foot, and bursting into sudden anger. 'You know nothing about him and you've no right to call him my poor pa, and you're a wicked, cruel woman to say he'll never love me. How dare you, Mitchell? how dare you?'

In her excitement, she began to sob violently.

'Get away from me!' she cried, striking at the servant with her clenched fist. 'Don't speak to me! You're a nasty, bad woman! Let me go! Leave me alone, I say!'

Mitchell would have detained her, but the little girl eluded her and rushed up the wide stairs, flew along a passage, and, entering a room at the end of it, shut the door with a bang and drew the bolt. Then she threw herself upon a low couch, and wept passionately.

'Miss Margaret, Miss Margaret!' Mitchell called out, shaking the door. 'Let me in, Miss Margaret! What ever have you bolted the door for, I should like to know?'

But Margaret returned no answer. She checked her weeping, and lay motionless upon the couch. After a few moments, she began to smile. It amused her to think that her tormentor was shut out.

'You can't come in,' she cried, at last. 'I'm busy. I've got my imposition to do. Go away, Mitchell, and don't let me catch the sight of your face again till tea-time!'

'Are you a good girl, Miss Margaret?' screamed the angry and baffled servant.

'What's that to you?' shouted Margaret in reply.

'You're a very rude girl!' vociferated Mitchell.

'I don't care,' cried Margaret. 'Go away!'

'I'll tell your pa, miss!'

'You'll do nothing of the kind.'

'I shall.'

'Do then!'

'Miss Margaret, you deserve a good whipping, and what's more, I should like to give it you!'

The child laughed derisively.

'I'll serve you!' exclaimed Mitchell. 'Two can play at that game, miss. I'll just lock you in!'

The key was on the outer side of the door. In a moment Margaret heard it turned in the lock.

'There!' cried Mitchell. 'You just stop there till it suits me to let you out.'

'I shall stay here as long as I like, and no longer,' returned the little girl. 'I shall go out through the window the moment I choose. So there!'

'Miss Margaret, if you dare——'

'Go away, Mitchell, and don't check me!'

'Miss Margaret——'

'I'm busy, Mitchell. Go away, will you?'

'Miss Margaret, when I lay hold of you, I'll give you a good sound whipping!'

'If you touch me, I'll knock all your teeth down your throat! Yah!'

'Miss Margaret, you're the vulgarest little girl I ever did see.'

'I don't care.'

'I'll make you care, miss. See if I don't!'

'All serene,' cried the child, with another peal of mocking laughter. 'Go away, will you? I've got my imposition to do.'

'You little impudence——' began Mitchell.

Margaret darted to the door, and put her lips to the keyhole.

'*Con-found you, go a-way!*' she roared.

'Miss Margaret, how dare——'

'*Go a-way!*' vociferated the child again. 'If you don't go away this minute I'll jump out of the window and break my neck!'

'Miss Margaret, how can you?'

'Go away, I say, you horrid woman! Go away, or I'll jump!'

The little girl made a pretence of hurrying across the room. Mitchell shrieked.

'Oh, don't, don't!' she cried. 'I'm going, Miss Margaret! Don't, there's a dear!'

She, in her turn, accentuated her departing footsteps, stamping loudly, as she went away. Little Margaret was left in the middle of the room, victorious, and she laughed merrily. Then she undrew the bolt.

'What *is* eight times seven?' she muttered.

Margaret's schoolroom was a long, low apartment, wainscoted, and heavily furnished with oak. A chintz-covered couch and easy-chair were the only modern luxuries it contained. Three latticed windows, with deep window-seats, looked south. A fourth window opened to the east, and this was shaded by the gnarled branches of an ancient apple-tree. There was a little table near this shaded window. It was strewn with books, and a slate lay upon it. The southern windows were uncurtained, and the fierce August sun still shone through them, although it was getting late in the afternoon. But the east corner was cool, and here, when she had exhausted her fit of laughter, Margaret seated herself, and drew the slate towards her.

Earlier in that same day two young ladies had been seated in Margaret's schoolroom conferring together, with heads drawn close and in whispering voices. Both were prettily dressed. They were going to a garden-party at Beaulieu. Miss Minimy's white dress and pale pink ribbons became her girlish beauty and her extreme fairness well. Miss Velvetine's dark silk showed her slender figure to advantage. But she lacked the amiability of expression which characterised her friend's countenance, and there was an austerity about her thin lips and her delicate nostrils which contrasted ill with Miss Minimy's sweet smile and tender eyes.

'You come and fetch me, Blanche,' Miss Velvetine had said. 'The child will be doing her preparation, and she won't hear what we say; and get Mrs. Minimy to fetch my mother; and then call for us at three. I can't leave till three. I must see she does her preparation for Mr. Pinington. Oh, you needn't hesitate! Mr. Jermine doesn't object. I know what he likes.'

So Blanche Minimy had come to Ule at half-past two, and while she and her friend chatted, little Margaret, who disliked none of her studies but arithmetic, had prepared her lessons for the morrow. The two girls had had much to say.

'I don't see it,' Miss Velvetine had said. 'The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that Lucius behaved ill. Of course there are palliating circumstances. But he shouldn't have done it, and I think I shall tell him so.'

'Poor fellow!' murmured Blanche. 'He's a nice fellow, Flora. I like him, you know. Of course, he is not like Regie. It is a different affair altogether. Regie——'

'My dear Blanche, I wish you wouldn't interrupt,' said Flora. 'I know you don't mean to be selfish, but you are getting into a very tiresome way of caring only for your own affairs. We were talking about *me*.'

'Oh, I beg your pardon,' said Blanche, blushing. 'Yes—of course. Well, what do you mean to say to Mr. Cleve? You've told him before that he shouldn't have proposed to you, you know.'

'Well, I can't say till I begin,' said Flora. 'I'm not going to break off my engagement, of course. I only want him to *feel* that he has done me an injustice.'

'Yes,' said Blanche.

'Well, hasn't he?' asked the other.

'I suppose so. You always say so,' said Blanche. 'Oh dear, I wish nobody wanted to marry any one! It would be so much nicer to go on always just as we are. What could I do at the head of a great big establishment? I don't want to be the mistress of a large house. If it wasn't for mamma, I shouldn't dream of marrying. But I can't bear to vex her, and though she doesn't say much, she *looks*. You know she'd like me to marry *you know who*. I like him. Oh, he's quite a dear! But then there's *l'autre*. Oh, dear, I'd much rather marry no one. Isn't it horrid, Flora?'

'Horrid!' echoed Flora. 'To have two county gentlemen at your feet! That's why I blame Lucius. If he had let me alone, they might have been at *my* feet.'

'I wish they were,' sighed Blanche. 'I don't want to marry. Why can't they leave me in peace?'

'You little goose?' cried Flora contemptuously. 'How are you going to live—eventually?'

She sank her voice to a sepulchral whisper, intimating that eventually meant at Mrs. Minimy's death.

'Well—yes,' said Blanche, dubiously. 'But what on earth should I do with Cecily, poor little thing!'

'Marry Regie Dryad then.'

'Oh, but he hasn't a penny!'

'They say old Mr. Dryad is as rich as Cræsus.'

'But he isn't obliged to leave his money to Regie. Regie told me so himself.'

'Very well. Then you'd better put up with Cecily.'

'Of course I'm very fond of children, and I can generally manage Cecily,' meditated Blanche.

'I wish I had such a chance,' remarked Flora.

'I'm sure I wish you had,' said Blanche, earnestly, 'then I shouldn't have to choose between two. Though I do like *you know who* very much, I'd give him up to you, dear—I would indeed!'

'Thank you. I don't want your leavings,' returned Flora, stiffly. 'I'm not sure that your conversation is proper, Blanche. I am engaged, you know.'

There was a brief pause.

'Flora,' began Blanche, deprecatingly.

'Well!'

'Don't be offended with me, Flora. I didn't mean——'

'I don't know what you mean, Blanche. What are you *thinking of*?'

'Oh, I beg your pardon, Flora. I only thought——'

'You think a great many very silly things, Blanche. Your head runs upon nothing but lovers. You'd better look out, or you'll lose your chance of a lover altogether. Men don't like flirts. I was engaged when I was seventeen, and I know.'

'Oh, yes, of course,' acquiesced Blanche, humbly. 'It only occurred to me that I couldn't marry both of them, you know.'

'Certainly not,' returned Flora, ironically. 'Marry *one* first, at all events. You are not engaged yet, I believe?'

'Flora, how unkind you are!' cried Blanche.

Her lip quivered. She was on the verge of tears.

'I'm only nineteen,' she said. 'And Isabel Ovid isn't engaged either!'

'Isabel isn't seventeen,' said Flora. 'Besides, she is not a particularly nice girl.'

'Why, I thought you liked her so much. I was getting quite jealous,' cried Blanche.

'And I thought you liked Mrs. Primulum so much. I was getting quite jealous!' retorted Flora.

Unnoticed, Margaret had slipped away to the piano. She had been singing softly to herself. At this moment, she raised her voice a little louder.

'Velvetine, Velvetine! Minimy-my!
Velvetine made my Minimy cry.
When Minimy-my began to cry,
Velvetine, Velvetine ran away'—

she sang to a little air of her own composing. The impromptu song had no reference to the immediate occasion. Margaret had not overheard the conversation, nor had she seen Blanche's moist eyes. But it was no uncommon thing that Blanche's tears should flow when she and Flora met, and the little girl had observed this. Miss Velvetine was her governess, and she hated her. But she loved Miss Minimy with all her heart. When her little song became audible, Flora arose in great wrath, and hastened across the room, glad to be able to expend her smothered annoyance upon a legitimate object.

'You very naughty little girl!' she cried, seizing Margaret's hand. 'How often have I forbidden you to sing things like that? It's—it's—it's *very* naughty,' she stammered.

'It's only *Georgie-porgie*, with different words,' said the child.

'It's very rude and very naughty,' repeated Flora. 'How dare you call people by anything but their right names?'

'I don't think she meant to be naughty,' said Blanche, coming up, and kissing the little culprit.

Margaret returned her caress with effusion.

'O my Minimy-my, you *are* my Minimy-my!' she cried.

'You are not at all a good girl, Margaret, and I am very much displeased with you,' said Flora. 'Didn't I set you an imposition for humming tunes at dinner? What was it?'

'Write out the Beatitudes,' replied Margaret reluctantly.

'Very well. I shall alter it now. You are much too rude and naughty to copy things out of the Bible. I shall give you three sums to do instead. Bring me a slate.'

Margaret moved away slowly.

'She hates sums,' added Flora.

'Oh, don't Flora!' said Blanche in a low tone. 'Poor little thing! I can't bear her to be punished. She's such a sweet.'

But Flora was inexorable. She had said three sums, and to three sums she adhered. Blanche looked over her shoulder.

'Oh, don't give her so many sevens,' she entreated. 'I remember I never could do eight times seven when I was a little girl.'

But she implored in vain. Flora compressed her lips, and added another seven instantly.

'I have no pity for little girls who don't behave like ladies,' she said. 'If my mother were to know how you behave, Margaret, she'd say you weren't a lady at all.'

Then a servant came into the room. Mrs. Minimy and Mrs. Velvetine had called for the young ladies. Flora prepared to go at once. She had left her gloves and parasol in another room and she hastened thither to fetch them. Blanche lingered a moment, to kiss Margaret again.

'Never mind, my sweet girl,' she said. 'Be a brave darling, and don't cry! Be quick over your sums, and then you can run out into the woods, and you're sure to find Henry. And remember, my pet, eight times seven are fifty-six.'

'O my Minimy-my!' cried the little girl, hugging her. 'I do wish you were my governess! But I'm not going to cry, my Minimy-my, and if Mrs. Velvetine comes here and gives me any of her cheek, I'll just kick her!'

'O my chicken!' cried Blanche. 'Oh, you shock me. I wouldn't be your governess for the world, you bad pet! You must *never* say such dreadful things. Now you must be as good as gold. Give me a sweet kiss. Good-bye, darling.'

So Blanche departed, and Margaret, left to herself, scanned the three sums ruefully. There was a row of a dozen figures to be multiplied by eight, there was another row of a dozen figures to be divided by nine. There were six long columns to be added up.

'I should like to play a good trick on Velvetine,' Margaret said to herself, 'I wish Henry would let me.'

And she thought how Cecily St. Roque had suggested to her to put an egg in Miss Velvetine's work-box, and had

proposed to her to put a little snake on the table in the place where the ruler always lay, and had urged her to do many other similar things to make Miss Velvetine jump. She had longed to do them, but Henry had always prevented her. It was caddish to play tricks on governesses, he said. Margaret did not know what caddish meant, but she inferred from Henry's manner that it was something too awful to be fully explained. Therefore, and to please Henry, she had never obeyed Cecily's instigations, and yet, what a pity it was! For oh, the delight it would be to make Velvetine jump! She looked round the room. If she could only play one little trick!—just to give Velvetine a little trouble—only that—not to make her jump. Velvetine had left her knitting on the window-seat. She would pull out the needles. That could not be caddish. She made up her mind to do this—presently. Then she felt more comfortable. Meantime, she would set to work on the hideous sums.

'Eight times three, twenty-four—carry two. Eight times two, sixteen, and two, eighteen—carry one. Eight times seven—what *did* the Minimy-my say eight times seven was? Fifty something—fifty-five, I think—and one, fifty-six—carry five. Oh, dear! Eight times eight—sixty-two—or is it sixty-four?—and five—'

Then came the proof, and the sum would not prove. Oh, how she hated Velvetine! She got up, and looked at the knitting.

'I don't care about Henry. I think I'll undo it,' she thought.

But she did care, and she did not undo it. She got on to the window-seat instead, and watched the cumbrous gambols of a great fly. She caught it at last, and put it through the window. Why should not the poor thing be out in the garden? Then she looked at the knitting again.

'I'll undo it when I've done the sums,' she said.

And she went back to her slate.

'Nines into nine—nines into ninety-nine. Why, that must be eleven! I can't put down eleven. Velvetine must have set it wrong. She's a regular pig. I won't do the nasty thing.'

It was at this juncture that Margaret had slipped down

stairs and betaken herself to the stables. Bensley, the grey-headed coachman, smiled to see her.

'Come to see the new pony, missy?' he asked.

'Oh, Bensley, I've got three beastly old sums to do,' said the child. 'What's eight times seven, Bensley?'

'Fifty-six, missy.'

'Fifty-six. That's just what the Minimy-my said. I hope I sha'n't forget again. Oh, Bensley, Velvetine's such a pig.'

'Now, missy, excuse me, but begging your pardon, that's just what Miss Minimy up and said she didn't like.'

'Oh, Bensley, but I'm so tired!'

'Well, missy, suppose you gets on the new pony, and takes a go round the yard?' suggested the man. 'How'll that do?'

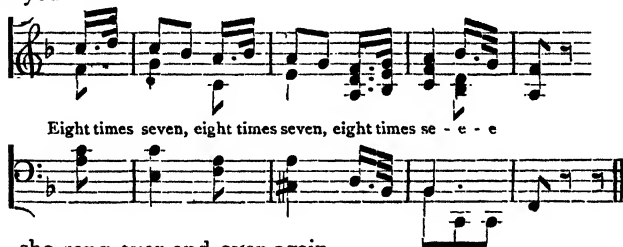
So the new pony was led out, and all the stable-men came to look on, and Margaret rode round and round the yard, and got hot and excited, and heard a good deal of language which, if good-natured, was not choice. At last, five o'clock struck, and Bensley reminded the little girl of her sums, and advised her to return to the schoolroom.

'And remember, missy, eight times seven is fifty-six,' he reiterated, as she reluctantly retired.

It was on her return from the delights of the stables that Margaret's encounter with Mitchell had taken place. When the latter had withdrawn Margaret laughed. Then she sighed. Then she drew her slate towards her.

'Eight times seven,' she began, frowning. 'Now what *did* Bensley say it was? I wish I hadn't met Mitchell! She's gone and put it all out of my head. Eight times seven—eight times seven.'

Almost mechanically, she rose and went to the piano, and began to play a few bars of Beethoven, singing softly as she played.



—she sang over and over again.

Suddenly she became aware that some one was whistling the air from outside, and she darted to the window. A lad of twelve years old was climbing the apple-tree.

'Oh, Henry!' she cried delightedly.

'Hullo!' he rejoined. 'I've been expecting you for hours. Cecily and the kids and I have had an awful lark. Why didn't you come? What's up?'

'Velvetine left me three disgusting old sums.'

'Why, Peggy?'

'Cause I sang my new song. She's an old pig. I was just going to pull out her knitting.'

'What's the good of doing that, Peggy? It's not like a gentleman to play stupid tricks. Why don't you do your sums, and come out?'

'They're so precious difficult, Henry dear. What's eight times seven?'

'Fifty-six. Don't you know that? What a little duffer you are! Here—I'll do them for you.'

The boy had been ascending the tree during this brief colloquy. Now he climbed carefully along a thick branch which rested against the wall of the house, and in a moment he had leaped into the room.

'Now, where's your slate?' he said. 'How you have smudged it! Look here! Here's a mistake first thing. Eight times seven, fifty-six, and one fifty-seven—and you've got a six down. What a little muff you are!'

'By George, Henry, how clever you are!' cried Margaret.

'Don't say *By George*, Peggy! I've told you not—often.'

'Well, I won't. Do go on, Henry dear.'

Henry did the three sums with great despatch.

'Do they really prove?' asked Margaret.

She was almost awed. Henry's rapid calculations seemed to her like witchcraft.

'Of course,' returned the boy, contemptuously. 'How could it be helped? Now will you come out? I've got something to tell you.'

'A nice thing, Henry! Oh, do!'

'What do you mean by *Oh, do*, you silly little thing? Will you come?'

'Yes—by the tree. Mitchell has locked me in.'

'What for? Have you been getting into a row with her again?'

'Only 'cause I went down and rode the new pony. I took and went——'

'Took and went! Why can't you talk like other people, Peggy?'

'I'm so sorry, Henry dear.'

Her eyes filled with tears.

'Well, never mind this time!' said the boy with a lordly air. 'Go on.'

'I took—I mean, I *went* and asked Bensley eight times seven, and he let me ride the new pony. He's chestnut, and the men said his mouth was like velvet, and they said stunning.'

'And did Mitchell catch you?'

'No. I met her coming back, and she got in an awful wax. So I ran away, and bolted her out, and then she locked me in. She and Velvetine are pigs. I was just going to undo Velvetine's knitting.'

'Now, Peggy, can't you behave like a gentleman? I've told you *not* to play tricks. It's like an idiot to play tricks.'

'Well, I won't, I won't! But don't say I'm not like a gentleman. That's what Velvetine says her mother would say, and I said if she did, I'd take and kick her. Isn't Velvetine disgusting?'

'Velvetine's a precious ass,' admitted the boy. 'Never mind her now. I'll tell you my news. There's a vacancy, and I'm going to Eton next month instead of at Christmas. What do you think of that, Peggy?'

'Oh, Henry dear!'

'Jolly, isn't it?'

Little Margaret looked at him wistfully, without speaking.

'You'll have the new pony, old girl, and old Pin's always nice to you, and you can go and see the Minimy-my,' said Henry.

'I know. But——'

'I shall come back at Christmas, Peggy.'

'Perhaps you'll go and forget me.'

'Never fear. Don't be a gaby. Why you're not crying, are you?'

'I can't help it,' sobbed the child. 'I do so love you, Henry dear.'

The boy's latent chivalry was aroused. He put his arm around his little playfellow, and let her rest her head upon his shoulder.

'There, there!' he said, patting her cheek, not ungently. 'Don't be a cry-baby, Peggy. Cheer up, old girl! I haven't gone yet, you know.'

'Do you want to go awfully, Henry?'

'Awfully, Peggy.'

'I wish I could go too!'

'Nonsense! Don't be a goose. Girls don't go to boys' schools.'

'I wish to goodness they did!' exclaimed the child.

'I don't Peggy. You'd get knocked down and killed the very first football match.'

They were interrupted by the sound of some one trying to open the door. Then followed a knock.

'What's the row?' Margaret called out. 'Who's there? The door's locked.'

Then they heard the key turned, and the door was opened.

'A gentleman wishes to see you, Miss Margaret,' said a servant.

Both the children stared, but neither spoke as a gentleman entered the room. He was a tall, strongly-built man. His face wore an expression of decision, almost of severity. But this expression was not fixed, and often his smile was pleasant, and sometimes tender.

'Are you Margaret Jermine?' he asked.

'Yes,' said she, standing on one foot, and holding the other in her hand.

'You don't know who I am, do you?' asked the gentleman.

'No,' replied she.

'But can you guess?'

'No.'

'Did you ever hear of Dr. Wheble?'

Margaret stared, without replying. Henry came forward.

'I have,' he said. 'You belong to Gladestreet House. The Miss Ovids live there.'

The newcomer laughed.

'Gladestreet House belongs to me, and the Miss Ovids are my nieces,' he said. 'Who are you, my boy?'

'Henry Bartropps.'

'Then I'm glad to see you,' said Wheble, holding out his hand. 'I knew your parents well. But how did you get through this locked door?'

'Oh, he got in through the window. He's a rattling good climber,' explained Margaret.

'Then you two are great friends, I suppose?' remarked Wheble.

'Oh, she just hangs about after me,' said Henry, with lofty superiority.

'He's done my blessed old sums for me,' added Margaret. 'Velvetine'll wonder how I made them prove.'

'And pray who is Velvetine, you imp?' inquired Wheble.

'Oh, she's my governess. Bensley says I ought to call her Miss Velvetine. But I never do, 'cause she's a pig.'

'Don't, Peggy,' muttered Henry, nudging her.

'What a monkey you are!' said Wheble. 'Who is Bensley? Your nurse?'

'No. The head groom.'

'The head groom!' echoed Wheble. 'Does your father allow you to talk to the head groom?'

'I never set eyes on him,' said Margaret.

Wheble did not speak. But something in his eyes emboldened Margaret to proceed.

'You see, Bensley's a downright good 'un, and he's taught me to ride, and he says I never funk,' she went on. 'Mitchell's an old idiot. She took and squeaked when she saw me riding without my habit. And Velvetine's a fearful nuisance. Crikey! how waxy she does get!'

Wheble smiled.

'You're a funny little girl,' he said. 'I hope we shall be good friends some day. But you mustn't talk to me as if I were a groom. I don't like it.'

'There, Peggy!' exclaimed Henry.

'Little girls should be like ladies, though they aren't grown up,' added Wheble.

At which gentle reproof Margaret slunk away, and squeezed herself into a corner between the piano and a large terrestrial globe.

'You shouldn't encourage her to talk like that, my boy,' said Wheble, in a vexed tone.

'I don't, sir. I'm always telling her,' said Henry. 'But

please don't be hard on her, sir. She's an awfully good little thing, and Mrs. Minimy says she hasn't a fair chance.'

'Who is Mrs. Minimy?' asked Wheble.

'I live with her at Bartrop's, and she's awfully jolly, and Miss Minimy's splendacious,' said the boy. 'But won't you forgive Peggy, sir? She's blubbering like anything.'

The little girl was indeed crying piteously. Wheble rose, drew her from her hiding-place, and set her on his knee.

'Don't cry, don't cry!' he reiterated, greatly distressed. 'I'm not angry with you. Don't cry.'

'Oh, I'm so unhappy,' sobbed the child. 'I didn't mean it—and Henry's going to school—and——'

Her incoherent lament was drowned in tears. Wheble pressed her closer to him.

'You mustn't cry like this, little one,' he said. 'I want to talk to you, and you really must stop these tears. Come, dry your eyes. Where's your pocket-handkerchief?'

Margaret slipped off his knee and dried her eyes slowly. She was still suspicious of the stranger, and stationed herself close to Henry. The lad conceived that in some way he had become her champion. He felt softened towards her, and, without any shamefacedness, he put his arm about her neck.

'There, don't cry, Peggy,' he said. 'It's all right, old girl.'

'You haven't told me how your father is, Margaret,' said Wheble.

'I don't know,' returned Margaret.

'She never sees him,' volunteered Henry.

'Oh!' ejaculated Wheble, frowning. 'Well, whom do you see, my child? What do you do all day?'

'Well, before breakfast, if I can get away from Mitchell, I hook it to Bensley,' said Margaret. 'And after breakfast Velvetine comes, and at eleven old Pin comes.'

'And who is old Pin?' inquired Wheble.

'Mr. Pinington,' said Henry. 'He lives on the island, you know, and he's Peggy's tutor.'

'He's a brick,' added Margaret. 'He teaches me most of my lessons. Velvetine teaches me the rest. I hate her. But I like my music.'

'And when does Miss Velvetine go away?'

'She goes away at three,' replied Margaret. 'And then

Henry and I lark about, and sometimes I ride, and sometimes we go on the lake, and sometimes I see Cecily, and sometimes I go to Bartrop's. But Henry's going to school, and it's an awful sell.'

'You must come and see me and my nieces,' said Wheble.

'I don't know,' returned Margaret.

'She isn't allowed to go anywhere,' said Henry.

'Well, we must see,' said Wheble. 'But when you come, I must have you talk nicely, and I should like you to have your hair brushed.'

Margaret looked astonished.

'By George!' she ejaculated.

'Margaret, I told you I didn't like to be spoken to as if I were a groom,' said Wheble mildly. 'You mustn't do it, my dear. You must use more appropriate language.'

'Oh, dash it!' cried the little girl, in confusion. 'Mayn't I say "crikey"?''

'No. You may not say "crikey," or "dash it." Ask Miss Velvetine what you may say.'

Margaret made a face.

'Velvetine says I'm not a nice child,' she said. 'I won't ask her. I'll ask the Minimy-my.'

Then Mitchell entered with the tea-tray, and Wheble bade Margaret good-bye. Henry prepared to follow him.

'Good-bye, old girl,' he said carelessly. 'Come out to-morrow. I'm going away the day after. I'm going to grandpapa's.'

'Oh, Henry!'

'Well!'

'Going away in the holidays! What a blackguard shame!'

'Peggy, don't talk to me as if I were a groom. I don't like it. Don't you see no one likes it? What a wretched little thing you are!'

'Oh, no, no!'

'Yes, you are. I'm quite ashamed of you.'

He ran away. But she pursued him, and caught him at the head of the stairs.

'Oh, Henry dear, *don't* say I'm a wretched little thing!'

'But you are, when you talk to gentlemen as if they were grooms.'

'I won't ever do it again, Henry dear.'

'Not till next time, I suppose?'

Then Margaret began to cry again.

'Are you coming, my boy?' Wheble called from below.

Henry kissed his little playfellow hurriedly.

'There, don't be a muff!' he said. 'Dry up, will you? Come, Peggy, am I ever unkind to you?'

'N—no.'

'Then why do you cry like this? You're a little donkey! What do you mean by it?'

'I don't know.'

'Then why do you howl? You've been howling all the afternoon, I declare. It's quite disgusting. Now I can't stop any longer, that nice old boy's waiting for me. You come out to-morrow, and we'll have no end of a lark. Ta-ta!'

He ran away gaily. Margaret's heart was bursting.

'Miss Margaret, are you ever coming to tea?' said Mitchell, approaching her. 'What, crying! What ever's the matter now, I should like to know!'

'Oh, confound you!' muttered Margaret, almost savagely.

She dashed past her tormentor, and, seating herself half-way upon her high chair, with her left foot swinging, she began to eat her bread and butter, sobbing all the while.

'You're the disagreeablest little girl I ever did see!' observed Mitchell, sitting down behind the tea-pot. 'Cry! cry! cry! Cry! cry! cry! and if you're not crying, you're saucy! I never did in all my born days! I wonder your poor ma doesn't turn in her grave. It'd be a good thing if your poor pa got married again, and give you a good strict mamma, with a birch rod! That's what I think. Now don't you sauce me, miss, or off to bed you go this minute.'

But Margaret could not fight Mitchell again. The events of the afternoon had at length exhausted the child's high spirits, and she relapsed into a sullen silence. Miss Velvetine's harshness and Mitchell's tyranny had not grievously hurt her. But Dr. Wheble's kind rebukes had touched her heart, and Henry's boyish roughness had broken it. She was completely crushed, and sat sobbing, and listening to Mitchell's tirade, without a word. At last she slipped away to the piano. There she found solace. Gradually her sobs ceased, and a sweet expression stole over her countenance.

'Lor', the dear child looks like a hangel,' said one of the

housemaids, peeping in through the half-open door. 'What a hodd man the master is, to be sure! One would ha' thought he'd a loved the little dear like the happie of 'is hey.' . .

'What ever are you doing there, Susan, I should like to know?' cried Mitchell, bustling up full of importance. 'Don't you know Mr. Jerming don't like Miss Margaret to make friends with any of the servants, not at all?'

CHAPTER III.

UPON the same afternoon that had chronicled so many passionate phases on the part of little Margaret Jermine, Lady Mary St. Roque, at the instigation of her son, had given a garden-party at Beaulieu. All the Gladeshire world had been invited, and, with a few exceptions, all the Gladeshire world came. True, Mr. Jermine had excused himself, and Mr. Pinington, from his island-dwelling, had sent a refusal, and old Mr. Dryad of Outwoods had declined the invitation. But young Dryad was there in his uncle's place, and the Ifes were there, and the Homers, and the Hathes, and Mrs. Minimy and Blanche, and Mrs. Velvetine and Flora, and Mr. Primulum, the young doctor, and his pretty wife, and the two Miss Ovids, who had just arrived at Gladestreet House to prepare for the return of their uncle, Dr. Wheble, from his travels, and a host of country clergymen and country squires, with their wives and families.

'It is superlative!' said Lady Mary sarcastically to her son. 'I hope you are content.'

'Thank you, mother. You have been very good,' returned St. Roque.

And he moved away. He was a plain man, with a clever face, oppressed by his unruly motherless children, and constantly hurt by his handsome mother, who reluctantly ruled his house, persistently neglected her grandchildren, and unceasingly grumbled at her hard fate in being constrained to conform her life to her son's ridiculous whims.

'I wish to goodness my son would marry again!' exclaimed Lady Mary, taking a seat beside two of her guests. 'It bores me insufferably to have him a widower. I hate Gladeshire. I always did. I told my husband so from the

first, and we never lived here. It's an intolerable nuisance that my son insists on living here. I wish Parliament sat all the year round! You don't know how I hail the session. You're very lucky, Mrs. Minimy, to have only a daughter. Sons are a mistake. A widowed daughter would look after herself and take care of her own children. But a son!—why a son is as helpless at forty as he was at four months! I wish to goodness he'd marry again! I'd lend his wife my diamonds whenever she wanted them—I would indeed!

Mrs. Minimy was a woman of barely forty, who was still pretty, and almost youthful in her appearance. A pink flush overspread her countenance as Lady Mary mentioned the jewels.

'My dear Lady Mary!' she murmured.

'I would, indeed,' repeated Lady Mary. 'And what's more, I'd give her my pearls. I'm getting too old for pearls, and I'd present them to my son's bride. I would really. It quite distracts me having to live here five months out of the twelve. I shall die of it, if it goes on much longer. Now I suppose I ought to go and talk to some one else. Miss Ovid, Mrs. Minimy will take care of you, I am sure.'

She got up and moved away. Miss Ovid, who was a good-looking woman of thirty, looked after her with an amused smile.

'What an oddity!' she remarked.

'She is so unlike her son,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'He is so nice. I don't know what I should do without him. You see, he is never above trifles. Henry's grandfather won't hear of details. He never would decide when Henry ought to go into trousers. But I consulted Mr. St. Roque, and he settled it at once. And then about papers. I wasn't sure whether *Punch* or the *Illustrated* would be the best for a boy. Mr. St. Roque didn't hesitate. He said, *Punch*, by all means. He is a great friend of Blanche's. She has no idea how much he admires her, and, of course, I say nothing. It's against my principles to make matches. But sometimes I do venture on little hints. They say Mr. St. Roque will be Prime Minister some day, if his party gets in again. So I just said to Blanche the other day,—“Fancy saying to a Prime Minister, ‘My dear, please go upstairs and fetch me my workbox,’ and the Prime Minister, going!” But such a thing might be in her power, you know.'

'Indeed, much stranger things have happened,' assented Miss Ovid, smiling.

'I should like Blanche to marry well,' continued Mrs. Minimy. 'She's my only child, and I couldn't bear to see her straitened. I was one of seven, and our father was a retired officer. We all married lieutenants, and none of them had a farthing. Besides, we were encouraged to be such silly girls. One of my sisters was engaged to four officers in the same regiment in succession, and at last married into a different regiment altogether. I couldn't let Blanche do the things we did. That's why I came here. I thought she would marry well, and not flirt with officers. I took warning by my sisters. So when I saw the advertisement requiring a lady to make a home for a boy of six, I answered it at once.'

'Then have you lived at Bartropps ever since that poor boy lost his parents?' asked Miss Ovid.

'Yes. For six years. Henry is the dearest boy, and so good-looking! He is going to Eton directly. But we are to stay at Bartropps just the same. Of course, I am glad. Blanche has so many friends here. Flora Velvetine is her great friend. I was instrumental in getting poor Flora here. Mr. Jermine of Ule wanted a governess for his little girl, and I ventured to recommend Flora. Curiously enough, she is engaged to a young Gladeshire man, one of the Cleves, of the Tag, Rag, and Bobtail Office. Mr. Jermine went up to town and arranged with Flora, and now she and her mother live at Gladestreet. I believe she gets on well at Ule, though Mr. Jermine is more eccentric than you can imagine.'

'I have heard of Mr. Jermine,' said Miss Ovid. 'I am almost sure he and my uncle used to be great friends. Didn't he lose his wife rather sadly?'

'Well, yes,' said Mrs. Minimy, lowering her voice and speaking with mystery. 'There was a baby, you know, and the mother died. Margaret is a sweet little girl, but neglected to the last point. She comes to us a great deal under the rose. But I nearly break my heart over her. She has a lovely skin, and they allow her to get tanned. I spoke to Flora about it. But she said she had nothing to do with that. So I gave the dear child a bottle of milk of roses. But she said her maid used it. So of course I didn't do it

again. But it's dreadful to see her running wild. I believe her father has never seen her.'

'Never seen his own child!' exclaimed Miss Ovid.

'I believe not,' returned Mrs. Minimy. 'They say he came from his wife's grave with his heart paralysed. Certainly, he is as cold as ice. He doesn't absolutely shun society. He called on me when I came to Bartropps, and one meets him out, perhaps twice a year. They say he is writing a wonderful book that is to transform the world!'

'He must be almost mad,' observed Miss Ovid.

'Well, I can't say,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'He talks cleverly enough. But he is full of crotchets. He has brought poor little Margaret up on the most extraordinary plan. He never allows her to have the same maid more than six months, and all the servants are perpetually changed. He doesn't want her to get fond of any one. He doesn't know she comes to Bartropps, and that she and Henry are constantly together. I don't know what he'd do if he knew. The consequence of all this is that she frequents the stables. She rides well, and the coachman is an old servant—the only one. He is fond of her, and she has picked up his talk, and she uses such language! When I show her anything pretty she says, "Good Lord, Mrs. Minimy!" And once I took her for a drive and we met this coachman following a funeral, and the child cried out, "By jingo, there's Bensley! What the deuce is he doing?" My dear Miss Ovid, I was scandalised. I actually wrote to Mr. Jermine about it. However, Blanche persuaded me not to send the letter. She said Bensley was kind to the poor little darling, and she didn't think he did her any real harm, and she'd speak to him and to Margaret. And she did. She went right into the Ule stables and had a long talk, and Bensley promised he'd try and not let Miss Margaret hear rough words, and he said he never swore on Sundays for fear he should die. And, as Blanche said, that showed the poor man had a good heart. We think Margaret is a little bit improved since that.'

'The child has great excuses,' said Miss Ovid.

'Oh, yes,' assented Mrs. Minimy. 'The fact is, the poor little pet has a loving heart, and nothing to expend it on. Mr. Jermine engages her nurses himself, and I believe he tells them to be unbending. Then, between ourselves, though Flora is a dear girl, and my Blanche's great friend,

she is a tremendous martinet—not at all the governess I would have for a child of mine. Mr. Jermine told her he particularly wished Margaret to be restrained. He said he required some one who would inform her mind, and not to be always fondling and caressing her. Flora isn't fond of children, so this just suits her. Henry says she bullies Margaret.'

'And does Miss Velvetine teach the child entirely?' asked Miss Ovid.

'No. She has a tutor—a clergyman—a Mr. Pinington. He had doubts,' said Mrs. Minimy, sinking her voice. 'I believe he positively entertains doubts about the miracles and the first chapter of Genesis, and he gave up a valuable living some years ago, and Mr. Jermine offered him a home at Ule. But he preferred to live alone on the island, and there he devotes himself to books, and he educates the child. He is a gentle, amiable creature, and Henry says he is kind to Margaret. But the poor little dear can't lavish much affection on a bookworm, and so she has no outlet but Henry, and the grooms, and Blanche, and me.'

'And is Mr. Pinington writing a book to transform the world?' inquired Miss Ovid.

'I don't know,' replied Mrs. Minimy. 'No one knows how he employs his time. It is said that he is weighing doctrines. What both he and Mr. Jermine want are wives. Men need the society of women even more than women do that of men. It's nature. If Mr. Jermine were sensible, like Mr. St. Roque, he'd marry again.'

In another part of the garden St. Roque was standing in front of Blanche Minimy.

'You said you would like to see my new bee-hives, Miss Minimy,' he said. 'Will you come and see them now?'

A young man was lounging on the broad seat by Blanche's side. He was fair and beautiful—a youth whom a goddess might have loved.

'Miss Minimy was just going to take a walk in the wood with me,' he cried, springing up.

He was Regie Dryad, the poet.

'Won't you come?' he pleaded.

The girl hesitated. Truth to say, she liked both her admirers too well, and loved neither. As she wavered Flora Velvetine and her lover approached them.

'We are going to take a turn in the wood,' said the former. 'Won't you and Mr. Dryad come too?'

'I should like it of all things,' cried Blanche getting up quickly. 'Mr. St. Roque, by and by I should so like to see the bees. You will show them to me presently, won't you?'

St. Roque bowed and drew back. 'He was disappointed. He had set his heart on this fair young girl, who knew not what love was. The four young people moved away without heeding him.

'Poor old St. Roque looks rather black,' observed Cleve to his lady-love.

'He's a very good *parti*, and Blanche is a great goose to chill him off like that,' said Flora. 'If I'd known, I wouldn't have asked her to come.'

'But he's rather old for her,' remarked Cleve.

'Old!' ejaculated Flora, with scorn. 'What does age signify? I wish your position were anything like his, Lucius!'

'So it may be, when I am his age, dear,' said Cleve.

'And what until then?' she asked.

'There will be enough. You don't mind doing without the feast for a short time, do you, dear?' he said.

'Yes, I do,' she retorted. 'I never ought to have accepted you. I might have attracted Mr. St. Roque if I hadn't come here pre-engaged!'

Cleve turned and looked at her gravely. There was nothing very remarkable about his appearance. He had a solid figure and a square face. His mouth was pleasant and his eyes tranquil. Flora had never yet seen his good temper disturbed.

'You are joking,' he said.

'No, I am not,' she rejoined. 'I mean what I say. I think you have been very unfair, Lucius. You inveigled me into an engagement when I was very young, and when mamma and I were not well off and knew very few people. Now that things are different, and we are in Gladeshire society, you——'

She paused.

'I suppose you mean that I ought to give you up,' said Cleve.

'Well—no—n-not exactly,' she faltered. 'But——'

Cleve looked puzzled.

'If you don't want me to give you up, what *do* you want?' he asked.

'Well—what I mean is—— You know, Lucius, I am considered rather pretty.'

'Yes, dear, I'm sure I've told you so myself a thousand times.'

'And *some* people think me rather clever, Lucius.'

'Yes. You know I think you *very* clever. What of that?'

'You see, Lucius, I might have made a better marriage. You ought to be rather proud of being engaged to me.'

'So I am, Flora.'

'Yes. But——'

'Now, Flora, what *do* you mean? I dare say I'm stupid. But I own I don't quite understand. You've said these sort of things before, and I think you ought to explain. If you want to marry Mr. St. Roque, say so, and I'll go away. I am not going to marry any girl against her will. But it's rather hard, when we've been engaged two years, and I love you so,' he added pathetically.

But Flora's lips were hard.

'I don't want to marry Mr. St. Roque,' she said. 'I only spoke of what *might* have happened. Of course I am going to marry you. But I think you ought to be aware that I shall make a great sacrifice for your sake.'

'Look here, Flora,' said Cleve. 'I am twenty-five, and you are nineteen. In two years I shall have enough to begin life upon, and we shall still be quite young. When I am forty—Mr. St. Roque's age—I shall be chief clerk of the Tag, Rag, and Bobtail office, with £4,000 a year. Are my prospects good enough to please you?'

'How cross you are, Lucius!'

'No, dear, I am not cross. But I must know. I can't stand your inuendoes.'

'Are you sure you will be the chief clerk in twenty years?'

'In fifteen. Quite sure.'

'How are you sure, Lucius?'

'Because I mean it, my dear.'

'Well, we can talk about it another time,' said Flora. 'You upset me, Lucius, when you are so violent.'

'I am so sorry,' said Lucius, penitently. 'But don't say things like that again, dear. You don't know how they hurt me.'

At this moment they came to a turn in the path they were following. Two ladies were approaching them.

'Oh, here are Mrs. Primulum and Isabee Ovid,' cried Flora.

By tacit consent the lovers separated. Flora passed her arm within that of Mrs. Primulum. The other lady fell behind with Cleve. Isabee Ovid was yet in extreme youth. She was pretty, dark, slim, and tender-eyed. There was a childish frankness about her, too, which was charming, and she began talking to Cleve at once. But he did not heed her remarks. His gaze was fixed upon Flora. He could almost hear the bending of the blades of grass she trod upon. But he had no ears for his companion. His heart was very sore.

'Do I seem unlike other girls?' asked Isabee.

And Cleve replied, 'Yes.'

'Yes?' she echoed, disappointed. 'Oh, do you really think so? Indeed, indeed I don't know what I do.'

Her clear eager voice aroused Cleve at last.

'I beg your pardon,' he said. 'I have been awfully rude. I wasn't listening to you. Can you ever forgive me?'

Isabee smiled.

'I oughtn't to have tried to talk to you when Miss Velvetine was just in front,' she said.

'But I'm awfully sorry,' said Cleve. 'I can't forgive myself.'

'Oh, I am not offended,' said the girl. 'Now I come to think of it, I believe I am glad. I was making you a confidence, Mr. Cleve, and I dare say I was foolish.'

'You were making me a confidence, and I was such a brute as not to listen!' exclaimed Cleve.

'Never mind, Mr. Cleve, it doesn't in the least matter. You were thinking of Miss Velvetine, and she has a right to command your thoughts.'

'She does command them,' said Cleve. 'But I ought to have listened to you, nevertheless. I can't excuse myself. You ought to be angry with me, Miss Ovid.'

'I am not,' she said simply.

'Miss Velvetine is vexed with me,' said Cleve. 'That was what made me so absent.'

'Is she?' said Isabee. 'I am very sorry.'

Her voice was sympathetic, and Cleve began to speak, almost as if to himself.

'Of course I have behaved ill,' he said, 'I ought never to have proposed to her. A man has no right to ask a girl to be engaged to him for four years. Has he?'

'I don't know,' said Isabee.

'He has not,' said Cleve emphatically. 'I ought never to have done it. I ought never to have spoken——'

'But if she loves you——' began Isabee.

But he went on impatiently.

'I ought to have waited. It was a great meanness on my part. It was a vile, low trick.'

'But if she loved you!' said Isabee, again.

'Miss Ovid, you don't understand,' said Cleve. 'I don't think women ever love. You don't any of you know what love is.'

'But I am sure we do!' cried Isabee.

Cleve shook his head.

'I have experience,' he said.

Isabee argued no further. She felt disturbed.

'You won't repeat what I've been saying?' said Cleve. 'Please don't.'

They had reached a little gate which led into the garden. Mrs. Primulum and Flora were waiting for them.

'How you have lagged!' cried the latter. 'I hope Lucius has been entertaining you, Isabee. He has been very cross to me, and nearly made me cry. But I'm going to be magnanimous and forgive him. You shall take me to have some claret-cup, Lucius, if you like.'

Blanche Minimy, strolling through the woods with Regie Dryad, had thought fit to take Flora Velvetine as the text of her conversation. She had a vague idea that she was doing a generous thing in impressing upon her companion that Flora was the prettiest and the cleverest girl in Gladeshire. At last Regie wearied of this friend-worship.

'I don't admire Miss Velvetine,' he said bluntly. 'She may be pretty. But she frowns too much, and she scolds. I've heard her scold Cecily. Don't let us talk of her. I want to talk about *you*.'

'Oh, but I am such an uninteresting subject of conversation,' said Blanche.

'Nay, Miss Minimy. You don't know——'

'Yes, Mr. Dryad, I know heaps of things. I know——'

'Let me tell you something else, Miss Minimy. I am a poet.'

'Yes, Mr. Dryad.'

'And I am going to make a name.'

'I wish you good success.'

'Thank you a thousand times. But the name will be of no value to me unless the goddess of my soul shares it with me.'

Blanche raised her forefinger.

'Now, Mr. Dryad, I forbid you to say a word more,' she said.

'Nay, Miss Minimy, I have gone too far. You must let me speak. I have £400 a year——'

'How fearfully unpoetical, Mr. Dryad! Fancy a poet talking of his income! Go away, sir, and roll your eyes in a fine frenzy!'

'Please, please, Miss Minimy, don't laugh! This is no laughing matter. You know I love you.'

So it was out. Blanche looked grave, and made no reply.

'You know I love you,' repeated the young man. 'I love you as the bright sun loves the rose.'

'O Regie!'

'My darling——'

'No, no! Don't—don't! I haven't said anything. I was going to say I was sorry.'

'But why are you sorry?'

'Leave my hand, Regie! Don't. Now do be good! I can't allow this—you know I can't. It's silly.'

'It is because you prefer Mr. St. Roque,' he said dismally.

'It is nothing of the sort. You have no right to mention Mr. St. Roque to me. What right have you to suppose I prefer *any one*?'

'But do you? O Blanche, Blanche, be kind to me!'

His voice was almost a wail. Blanche was touched.

'Don't, Regie!' she said gently. 'You are not kind to me. You oughtn't to tease me in this way.'

'But will you?' he pleaded.

'I don't know. I couldn't give you an answer in such a hurry. You must wait—till Christmas.'

'At Christmas you will be Mrs. St. Roque,' he said mournfully.

'Indeed! You are a prophet; then, as well as a poet?'

'I know it. You are a woman.'

'A woman! And pray did you suppose I was anything else? Did you think I was a fish?'

'You are *you*!' he cried with passion. 'That is how I know. You have taken my heart and played with it, and now you are going to marry Mr. St. Roque.'

'Then I wonder you thought of speaking to me like this.'

'Have you no pity for me, Blanche?'

'You are rude, sir. No. I have none.'

She walked on, and he followed silently. But she could not be happy. Her tender heart ached for Regie's disappointment. Hers was no Juliet nature. She could not respond to a passionate appeal. But she was affectionate and kind-hearted, and it troubled her that Regie should be sorrowful. At last she turned her head.

'Mr. Dryad, I quite forgive you, and I am very sorry,' she said gently. 'I wish this hadn't happened. I couldn't help it, you know. But you do me an injustice when you say I have played with you. I never meant to be unkind—indeed I didn't. I don't want to be married at all. I never thought of such a thing. I am very, very sorry you ever thought of it. I couldn't help it, could I?'

'I suppose not,' said he dubiously.

'You see, I have no brother, and it was pleasant talking to you,' said she simply. 'I am so sorry if you misunderstood. Will you forgive me?'

'I forgive *you*!' he exclaimed.

'Yes. If you think I was wilfully unkind.'

'You angel!' he murmured.

'But *do* you forgive me?' she insisted.

'Forgive you!—as the thirsting earth forgives the unyielding heavens!'

She laughed.

'You foolish fellow!' she said, sweetly.

St. Roque was approaching them. She tripped smiling to meet him.

'Will you take me to 'see the bees now?' she said. 'I should so like it.'

'I shall be most proud,' replied St. Roque.

They walked slowly across the lawn, and Regie slipped away unobserved.

'Dr. Wheble has suddenly come home,' said St. Roque. 'The Miss Ovids have gone off at once. Miss Ovid has promised to bring her uncle to dinner to-morrow, Miss Minimy, and Mrs. Minimy says she will come too, if you will. Will you?'

'I should like it very much,' said Blanche.

At this moment three children burst from behind a belt of shrubs and rushed towards them. They were dirty and dishevelled. The girl's frock was torn. The little boys were hatless, heated, wet.

'We've been fishing in the mere at Ule, with Henry,' screamed the little girl. 'It *was* such fun!'

St. Roque uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

'My dear Cecily, you are not fit to be seen,' he said. 'Where is Miss Alcott?'

'Oh, we ran away from her long ago,' said the child. 'She's a bother.'

'Cecily, Cecily!' said St. Roque.

'I don't care,' said Cecily stoutly.

'Come here to me, Cecily,' said Blanche, seating herself on a rustic bench. 'My dear little girl, I'm shocked to see you look so untidy. I'm afraid you've not been quite good, and I can't be pleased, my darling. I can't, indeed.'

'Oh, Miss Minimy, I—I——' stammered the child.

Her lip quivered. She was ready to cry. To be in disgrace with Miss Minimy was a punishment that no child could endure.

'But you must be good, my dear,' said Blanche. 'Poor Miss Alcott! I am shocked to think you ran away from her. You must go and look for her at once, and tell her you are very, very sorry. Fie, dear pet! How could you? Why, you are all green! and the boys, too! How *could* you, my sweet girl? And think how you've vexed poor papa! Won't you go and tell him you're sorry?'

Cecily was sobbing bitterly.

'I will—I will,' she gasped.

And she rushed into her father's arms.

Lady Mary, with her eye-glass raised, witnessed this little scene.

'That girl is worth her weight in gold, Mrs. Minimy,' she said, with energy. 'I declare I'd let her *keep* my diamonds, if she'd only accept my son !'

CHAPTER IV.

SOMEWHAT to the surprise of the other guests the two recluses of Ule appeared in the drawing-room at Beaulieu on the following evening. St. Roque had invited them with some *empressement*. He was, indeed, anxious that no young man should be present to attract the attention of Blanche Minimy. But neither of the gentlemen perceived his ulterior design, and they had felt it impossible to refuse to welcome Wheble. Jermine and Wheble shook hands cordially.

‘I am glad to see you back,’ said the former. ‘I was sorry to miss you.’

‘I made acquaintance with your daughter,’ said Wheble.

‘Did you?’ returned Jermine.

‘Yes. Didn’t she tell you?’

‘No. I haven’t seen her.’

‘No?’

‘No.’

‘She is a most interesting child.’

‘I am glad you think so.’

‘And exceedingly pretty.’

‘Oh!’

‘But as wild as a bird, Jermine.’

‘Indeed!’

‘You don’t seem to know much about her, my dear fellow.’

‘There is nothing particular to know. I provide for her education, and I particularly desire that she should have no idiosyncrasies or characteristics. I want her to be calm, equable, and happy.’

‘You are succeeding admirably. She is unhappy, excitable, and passionate.’

‘What?’ said Jermine.

But at this moment dinner was announced, and the two old friends were parted.

The ladies present were five in number. But they were not the company originally invited. Late in the afternoon, Miss Ovid had sent word that her sister was not well and would not be able to come. Lady Mary had been annoyed at first. Then she had sent a verbal message to Miss Velvetine to ask her to fill the vacant place, and Miss Velvetine had accepted the invitation. Blanche had been with her friend when the message arrived.

‘It’s rather impertinent of Lady Mary,’ Flora had said, captiously.

She had just parted from her lover, after some words which were unpleasant. She had told him again that he had done ill in drawing her into a long engagement.

‘It wasn’t manly of you,’ she had concluded.

‘You said that yesterday,’ he had rejoined. ‘If you want to jilt me, say so.’

His retort had not pleased her.

‘You use such coarse expressions,’ she had said. ‘Jilt you! What do you mean? I don’t say it mightn’t be advisable to leave our engagement in abeyance for a time. But jilt you! You are very rude.’

‘What do *you* mean?’ Cleve had exclaimed. ‘Leave our engagement in abeyance! I don’t understand.’

‘I meant, we might tacitly agree not to be absolutely engaged at present—that is, not correspond and not use Christian names,’ Flora had explained. ‘You could come back by and by, you know.’

‘You mean you would be free and I bound,’ Cleve had said gruffly. ‘No, thank you, Flora. I love you from the bottom of my heart. But I respect myself also. If you are free, I will be free, too. If it is to be good-bye at all, it must be good-bye for ever.’

‘You know I don’t mean that,’ she had said. ‘You are ill-natured, Lucius, and you are quite changed. You never used to speak to me like this.’

Then he had relented a little.

‘No, dear, I am not changed,’ he had averred. ‘But you spoil all my happiness by constantly saying things like this. It makes me doubt if you really care for me. If you don’t,

I will give you up. I tell you, I'd sooner cut off my head than force any girl to be my wife against her will.'

'I don't believe *you* care for me, or you couldn't talk so lightly about giving me up,' Flora had said fretfully.

Then Blanche had come in, and Cleve had gone away.

'He has been so cross,' Flora had said, pouting.

'Has he, dear?' Blanche had returned. 'What about?'

'Oh, the old story,' Flora had said, impatiently. 'I *can't* make him see he has injured me.'

Whereupon Blanche had expressed her sympathy, and when Flora's ruffled feelings were somewhat soothed, she had unfolded the subject of her errand.

'We are going to dine at Beaulieu to-night, and I want to know what you advise me to wear,' she had said. 'Of course my blue is quite new, and I've worn my pink several times. But then the pink *does* suit me so well. Mamma rather inclines to the pink. Pink is quite my colour, isn't it? Which do you advise, Flora?'

'I don't think it matters in the least,' Flora had replied. 'Wear what you like. What can it signify?'

'Oh, but it does!' Blanche had affirmed. 'Mr. St. Roque——'

'Mr. St. Roque doesn't care a farthing how you dress,' Flora had said spitefully. 'He wants some one to look after Cecily and those imps of boys. That's all. He doesn't care whether you're in velvet or sackcloth.'

'O Flora, how unkind!'

'I'm not a bit unkind. You ought to be glad to know the truth. It's what every one is saying.'

Then the tears had started to Blanche's eyes.

'What is every one saying?' she had asked.

All the glee had gone out of her voice.

'That Mr. St. Roque is looking for a wife who will be good to his children,' Flora had told her.

'Do they really, Flora?'

'Of course.'

'*Who* said so, Flora?'

'Oh, I don't know. Every one.'

'How dreadful! What ought I to do?'

'Accept him, my dear, when he asks you. You'll be the mistress of Beaulieu, at any rate.'

'But I don't want to be. I don't care about being

married at all. Only, if I *do* marry, I've always thought I should like some one to be fond of me. And I thought Mr. St. Roque really *did* like me. His eyes *look* as if he did.'

Then Flora had laughed sarcastically, and while she was laughing and Blanche's eyes were still full of tears, Lady Mary's message had arrived, and Flora had remarked that Mr. St. Roque's mother was impertinent. She had consented to go, however, and Blanche had departed, still undecided as to what she should wear. But when she was ushered into Lady Mary's drawing-room she looked radiant, and St. Roque thought her lovelier than ever.

The dinner, however, was not a great success. The presence of the stately and impervious Jermine was chilling. Lady Mary's outspokenness was far from pleasing. The gentleman from the island was shy, and unused to society. St. Roque was preoccupied. His eyes and ears were for one guest only. The conversation flagged. It was disjointed and tedious. There were frequent pauses.

'I wish the world went more smoothly,' murmured Blanche to a gray-headed stranger, who had been talking to her of philanthropic schemes. 'Why is it that nothing is ever quite satisfactory?'

'Is that so, Miss Minimy?' asked St. Roque.

'My dear Miss Minimy, 'tis love that makes the world go round,' said Lady Mary.

'I beg your pardon. I disagree with that sentiment *in toto*,' said Jermine.

'So you say. But none of us believe you. The unworldly are shocked, and the worldly—in the person of myself—jeer,' said Lady Mary, with effrontery. 'My dear Miss Minimy,' she went on, without a pause, 'why don't you wear a high black velvet, with short sleeves and diamonds? Such a dress would suit you *à merveille*.'

'O Lady Mary!' murmured Blanche.

'Diamonds do not give happiness any more than love,' observed Jermine.

'What does?' inquired the philanthropic stranger.

'Tranquillity of mind,' replied Jermine.

'What has given you the greatest happiness, Jermine?' asked Wheble.

'Study, and the contemplation of Nature,' returned Jermine.

'Fiddlesticks!' cried Lady Mary. 'I don't believe it.'

'But it is true,' asserted Jermine.

'I find the greatest happiness in my daughter,' said Mrs. Minimy softly.

'And I have experienced the greatest pain in hearing a daughter say that she never sees her father,' said Wheble.

'I think that love gives the greatest happiness, and the highest,' said St. Roque.

'So do I,' acquiesced Mrs. Minimy. 'Love and a good appearance. One must have good looks. I wish Mr. Jermine would think more of his little girl's looks.'

'What is that?' asked Jermine, catching his own name.

'I was only speaking of your dear little girl, Mr. Jermine,' explained Mrs. Minimy. 'She is a sweet child. But have you noticed how terribly sunburnt she is?'

'You are most kind, Mrs. Minimy,' replied Jermine. 'But I have no objection to my daughter being sunburnt. Indeed I should be glad if she were to grow up plain. Beauty engenders love, and love is an unmixed evil.'

'My dear Mr. Jermine!' exclaimed Mrs. Minimy.

'What a parcel of nonsense you are talking!' cried Lady Mary. 'My good sir, like all philosophers, you are as blind as a bat. For heaven's sake, make your girl beautiful if you can, and be thankful! What doesn't beauty give? It gives *love*, and love has gifts. People associate love with cottages and poverty. Fiddle-de-dee! There's just as much up stairs as down stairs. Are you listening, young ladies? I tell you, cultivate love. Rich men fall in love quite as desperately as poor ones, and when love is wealthy—good heavens, when love is wealthy, he is worth any sacrifice! A rich lover is a prize that a girl might almost die to win!'

'Nevertheless, I do not wish my daughter to love,' observed Jermine.

'Nevertheless, she *will* love, and moreover she *does* love, if I am not very much mistaken,' said Wheble. 'You won't let her love you, and so she loves a groom.'

'Oh, how *could* you!' murmured Blanche, looking reproachfully at Wheble.

'I don't comprehend,' said Jermine.

'Margaret is a very nice child,' muttered Pinington, with his chin buried in his beard.

'She is a darling,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'Blanche quite dotes on her.'

'Blanche dotes on her!' cried Flora.

'I don't comprehend,' repeated Jermine.

Lady Mary laughed.

'You have let the cat out of the bag, Dr. Wheble,' she said. 'You'd much better leave Nature to herself, Mr. Jermine.'

Then she looked at Mrs. Minimy, and the ladies retired.

'Oh, mamma, how could you!' exclaimed Blanche. 'Now Mr. Jermine will find it all out and never let Margaret come to us again. Oh, what a pity! what a pity!'

'But what is it all?' demanded Flora. 'I didn't know Margaret ever saw you except when you come to Ule to see me.'

'Don't tell Mr. Jermine, Flora dear,' implored Blanche. 'Please, please don't!'

'I can't promise,' said Flora. 'How is it you and your mother know so much about the child? Come, Blanche, you must tell me. I have a right to know.'

'I will see fair play,' said Miss Ovid.

And the three younger ladies stationed themselves near a distant window.

'I am sorry I spoke so unguardedly,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'But at the moment, I never paused to think. It is so awful that Mr. Jermine should never see his own child. I should die of grief if I were separated from Blanche.'

'Oh, nonsense!' cried Lady Mary. 'My dear Mrs. Minimy, your daughter will marry, and you'll be as happy as possible without her.'

'It would be quite a different thing to part with her to a good husband,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'But to have a daughter, and neglect her childhood! Such a thought fills me with horror! Why, the child's whole future may be altered for want of a gauze veil and gloves, and all that!'

'Oh, one can't expect a man to bother about things of that kind—not the most devoted father,' said Lady Mary, indifferently. 'Besides, I don't think it signifies at Margaret Jermine's age. She can be washed in rose-water before she comes out. If she's really pretty she'll be all right. Is she really pretty?'

'Her features are lovely, and her eyes quite exquisite,'

replied Mrs. Minimy. 'It's her complexion I grieve over. She's as tanned as a gipsy.'

'But does she freckle?' inquired the other lady. 'I don't mind anything but freckles.'

'No. She has no freckles,' returned Mrs. Minimy. 'She gets brown, with a red colour in her cheeks.'

'Every one can't be pink and white like your Blanche,' said Lady Mary. 'Depend upon it, little Jermine will turn out all right in the end. I only hope her father won't marry that Velvetine girl, I don't like her.'

Mrs. Minimy unfurled her fan.

'Flora Velvetine is engaged,' she said.

'Engaged!' echoed the other. 'She'd jilt young Cleve as soon as say good-morning. She'd accept any one of the men here this evening, and not blush. Now I don't mind a nice flirt like your Blanche. She is a lovely girl, and she has a right to expect attentions, and I must say she receives them very prettily. She flirts *pour s'amuser*—not for any ulterior motive. But that horrid little Velvetine makes a business of it. All she wants is the best slice of the cake. I only hope young Cleve will jilt *her*. It would serve her right.'

At that moment Flora was enunciating some of her views to Miss Ovid and Blanche.

'I think a girl ought to do the best she can for herself,' she said. 'In fact, it's almost due to her parents that she should. Of course, one must marry. Mamma says unmarried women are simply nobodies. A married woman has a position. She goes into dinner first, and has many privileges. So of course one must marry, and a girl ought to try and marry well. As Lady Mary said, rich men fall in love quite as often as poor men.'

'Will Mr. Cleve be rich?' inquired Blanche, innocently.

'I should think not,' replied Flora.

'But——' began Blanche.

'Of course, my dear, I'm only speaking hypothetically,' said Flora. 'I never can see why—because a girl is engaged—she should put herself out of the pale of speculation, as if she were married. A hundred contingencies may arise. There are endless slips between the cup and the lip. One's *fiancé* may prove false, or he may die, or go mad, or——'

'Why, Miss Velvetine, you make my hair stand on end!' cried Miss Ovid. 'Talk of a lover going mad or dying——'

'It doesn't make him go mad or die,' said Flora calmly.

'No. But it seems to imply——'

'What?'

'That you don't care for him.'

'She doesn't,' said Blanche laughing. 'It's a case of unrequited affection on poor Mr. Cleve's part.'

'Will you be quiet, Blanche?' exclaimed Flora, angrily. 'How dare you say such a thing? People who aren't engaged know nothing about it. Thank heaven, I can be in love and keep my balance at the same time!'

'What do you mean by keeping your balance?' asked Miss Ovid.

'I mean that I consider an engagement merely provisional,' said Flora. 'I don't see why a girl who is engaged should act as if she were shut up, and if somebody else makes her an offer, and she likes to accept it, I don't see that she is to blame.'

'And do you allow the same liberty to the gentleman?' inquired Miss Ovid.

'No gentleman would take advantage,' said Flora.

'Oh!' said Miss Ovid, significantly. 'Yours is rather a curious code of conventionality, Miss Velvetine. I must say I don't approve of it.'

'Nor do I,' added Blanche. 'Mamma would be horrified if I were to accept two men at once.'

'Wait till you are tried,' said Flora sarcastically. 'People who aren't engaged know nothing about it. *When* you are engaged, Blanche, offer your opinions.'

'And when you are married, Miss Velvetine, publish yours,' said Miss Ovid, good-humouredly. 'I advise you not to express them too gratuitously now. Mr. Cleve might go mad or die, you know, if he knew that you were able to be in love and keep your balance.'

Perhaps Flora herself might have lost her reason had she been aware of her lover's whereabouts at that moment. Late in the evening Cleve had called to see Flora, with the intention of expressing his contrition for having spoken warmly in the afternoon. He had, however, found Mrs. Velvetine alone.

'Flora is dining at Béaulieu,' she said.

'Oh, she didn't tell me,' said Cleve, disappointed.

Mrs. Velvetine drew her thin lips together and smiled. But she withheld the information that Lady Mary's invitation had arrived after Cleve's departure.

'I think she might have told me,' he continued. 'I've walked two miles to see her.'

'You must take your chance, Lucius,' said the mother. 'You can't expect Flora to be always at your beck and call. You must recollect that a *fiancé's* prerogative is very slight. It is impossible that Flora should sit at home morning, noon, and night, waiting for you.'

Cleve was silent.

'Flora is very popular,' continued Mrs. Velvetine. 'Every one wants her. She might have settled very well here—where there are so many unmarried men—but for circumstances.'

'I don't think you ought to say so to me, Mrs. Velvetine,' said Cleve.

Why not, Lucius? *Some* men—but never mind! I won't say what I was going to say.'

'Yes, Mrs. Velvetine, pray do.'

'No, not for worlds!'

'But I have almost a right to insist.'

'Perhaps. But I shall not gratify you.'

'Mrs. Velvetine, will you tell me one thing? Is Flora *gêné*d by our engagement?'

'I can't say, Lucius.'

'But I beg you to say. I can't bear hints. Flora has hinted things, and now you hint them. It makes me miserable. I can bear to be miserable, but I can't bear to annoy Flora. Is she tired of her engagement?'

'Oh, my dear Lucius, all girls get tired of their engagements,' said Mrs. Velvetine. 'Don't you be distressed. When Flora is really tired, I don't doubt she'll tell you.'

After this unsatisfactory colloquy, Cleve walked home slowly and sadly. On his way he met Isabee Ovid. She was better, and had come out for a stroll. The two paused to speak.

'Let me escort you home, Miss Ovid,' said Cleve.

Oh, thank you! You are very kind. But pray don't trouble,' she said.

'It will be a pleasure,' Cleve declared. And he turned and walked with her.

'My sister and uncle are dining at Beaulieu,' said Isabee.

'So is Miss Velvetine,' said Cleve.

'And they didn't ask you? What a pity!'

'I don't think it matters,' said Cleve. 'Miss Velvetine would just as soon be without me.'

'Oh, Mr. Cleve!'

'Yes, she would. You don't understand. The fact is, I've taken a false step, and I don't know how to retrieve it. It would be unmanly of me to make the first advance. And yet——'

He looked at her anxiously. But she remained silent. 'She was too young and inexperienced to help him. She did not even comprehend what he meant.'

'What should you do if you were engaged?' he asked, after a moment. 'Perhaps you are engaged,' he added, bitterly. 'No one would know that Miss Velvetine was engaged.'

'No, I'm not,' faltered Isabee.

'What should you do if you were?' he reiterated, more gently.

'I should love him,' she said, blushing.

'So you think now. But if the engagement went on and on—what then?'

'I should go on loving him, of course,' said she.

'Really?'

'Oh, yes!'

'But shouldn't you think him a brute for having proposed to you?'

'Oh, Mr. Cleve, how could I? He would have loved me.'

'Then you would care to be loved?'

She did not reply. She bent her pretty face and reddened again.

'I didn't think women cared to be loved,' said he.

'Oh, how can you say such a thing!' she cried.

'Miss Velvetine doesn't care.'

'Oh, Mr. Cleve, she must.'

'No, she does *not* care.'

'Then please don't say so. I think you will be sorry.'

He looked at her for a moment and then smiled.

'I believe you are right,' he said slowly. 'I oughtn't to have spoken so freely. I never have to any one else. You didn't tell any one what I said yesterday?'

'No. Oh, no! You told me not.'

'Thank you. You are very kind to me, and I am a brute. I wish I knew what to do.'

'If Miss Velvetine loves you——' began Isabee.

'Ah, that's the point, Miss Ovid. *If*—it's such a big word. Of course, *if* she loved me, all would be right.'

Then they reached Gladestreet House, and Isabee put out her hand. Cleve held it for a moment.

'Please be my friend,' he said. 'Even if I should do something that looks unhandsome, please believe my motive was good. Will you?'

'Yes,' she said simply.

Then he lifted his hat and went.

'What a dear little girl she is!' he thought.

Flora, sitting at the piano at Beaulieu, guessed nothing of this interview. She was elated, and a splendid thought was figuring in her imagination. It was Jermine who stood behind her, and whose hand turned her pages. And it had occurred to Flora's mind that she was as worthy as Blanche to be the mistress of a fine establishment.

Flora played well. Jermine, who was musical, thought that she played without feeling. This, however, did not displease him. In the various interviews that he had had with his daughter's governess, he had become more and more convinced that she would not engage Margaret's affections. Now, upon hearing her play for the first time, he was assured that she was cold.

'Thank you,' said he, when she had concluded. 'I am glad to have this opportunity of speaking to you, Miss Velvetine. I want an explanation of what passed at dinner. Upon asking Dr. Wheble what he meant, he told me that he found Margaret closeted with young Bartropps, and that she spoke warmly of my coachman. How comes she to know this boy?'

'I also was surprised,' said Flora. 'I insisted on Blanche Minimy explaining what her mother meant, and it appears that the Minimys are in the habit of luring Margaret to Bartropps, and allowing her to play with the boy. I am

greatly distressed. You may be sure that I knew nothing of it.'

'I am sure of that.'

'What shall I do? Shall I forbid Margaret to speak to Henry Bartropps?'

'No. I think I can suggest a better plan, which I will divulge to you later.'

'I fear you are very much annoyed, Mr. Jermine.'

He smiled slightly. It was impossible to read his thoughts. The expression of his countenance scarcely varied.

'I am glad to have discovered what is going on,' he said. 'No, I am not very much annoyed. Bad habits are easily rectified in childhood. I had scarcely realised Margaret's age. She must have more supervision. Is she going on well in other respects?'

'I do my best, Mr. Jermine. But I fear that, after what has transpired to-night, you will think my best insufficient.'

'Nay, Miss Velvetine, do not reproach yourself. The error has been mine. I have allowed my daughter too much freedom. There is no one to whom I would sooner confide her than to you.'

'Indeed, Mr. Jermine, you are very kind.'

'Not at all. I place the utmost reliance on you.'

Flora's heart beat high.

'I hope I may be able to continue Margaret's education,' she said, modestly.

'Is Mr. Cleve going to take you from us soon?' inquired Jermine.

'Not *soon*. Perhaps, indeed, never.'

'Perhaps never?'

'It is possible. Mr. Cleve and I do not always agree. He upsets me.'

'I am sorry,' began Jermine.

'Nay,' she said. 'Such an event would not affect me much.'

Jermine looked at her, surprised. He was a philosopher, and he was writing a voluminous treatise on the erroneousness of love. But this calm assertion repelled him. After a scarcely perceptible pause, however, he replied to her.

'You have a tranquil mind which can rise above the harassing complications engendered by the affections,' he

said. 'You are right. With a cultivated understanding like yours, you are sure to be happy, whatever befalls you.'

'I am not sure that Mr. Cleve would make me happy,' said Flora. 'He is too violent—too impetuous.'

'I am sure that whatever you do will be right,' remarked Jermine. 'You have all the qualities that are essential to happiness. Your mind is calm and well-regulated. Your balance seems to me to be perfect. You are, indeed, the person who ought to marry, because you will be able to command happiness under any circumstances. To be without emotion is to be an ideal character.'

• Again Flora's heart bounded.

'I fear Margaret has a tendency towards the emotional,' she observed. 'I do all in my power to check it, but it is not always easy to do so. I was wanting to ask if you wished her music to be encouraged. She delights in it, and already improvises. But I have sometimes asked myself whether it is not an exciting pursuit.'

'Music is a basis for happiness,' said the father. 'It is one of the things of which we cannot be deprived. Encourage Margaret's musical talent by all means. But she must learn the theory of music. She must not merely enjoy the luxury of sweet sounds. And I will not have her taught to sing. Without words, music is innocuous. Allied to words, it naturally becomes a mere vehicle to express emotion. And I need not repeat to you, Miss Velvetine, that my one desire for my daughter is to give her future happiness a sure foundation. Music will not hurt her, if it be regarded as a science.'

• St. Roque and Blanche were out in the moonlit garden.

'I wish some one could make Mr. Jermine kind to his little girl,' the latter was saying. 'Can no one influence him?'

'Then you don't agree with his theory?' said St. Roque eagerly.

'No, I must love my mother, and Henry—and others,' returned Blanche.

Then Wheble came out to fetch Miss Minimy. In the drawing-room every one was saying good-bye.

'I dare say I shall see you at Bartrop's on Saturday, Miss Velvetine,' said Jermine. 'Mrs. Minimy has made me promise to come to her garden-party.'

'I shall see *you* on Saturday,' murmured St. Roque, pressing Blanche's hand.

Then they were all gone.

'The Gladeshire people make me sick,' said Lady Mary yawning. 'If you don't marry Blanche Minimy, Adrian, you will have the satisfaction of committing me to a lunatic asylum.'

'My dear mother, pray don't stay here, if it irks you so intensely,' said St. Roque.

'I'll stay till Christmas,' returned she. 'At Christmas I go, come what will. Blanche is a charming girl, and I shall be delighted to resign in her favour. But if she refuses you, don't fall back upon that Velvetine girl. She's a vulgar flirt, and I've a great mind to tell Lucius Cleve what I think about her. Mr. Jermin must be a fool to put his child under her care.'

CHAPTER V.

BUT while Mr. Jermine and Miss Velvetine were placidly discussing plans for the thwarting of the emotional side of Margaret's character, strange doings were being enacted at Ule. Margaret had been put to bed unusually early. On some pretext or another Mitchell generally contrived to get rid of her little charge betimes, and on this particular evening the excuse had not been difficult to find. Margaret had come to tea very late, very untidy, and splashed from head to foot. Moreover, she had refused to give any account of her doings. In vain Mitchell had scolded and raved. In vain she had questioned and threatened. Margaret had preserved an obstinate silence, and at last Mitchell had become wearied.

'You're a very naughty little girl, and what ever will become of you *I* can't guess,' she had said. 'Sit down directly, and have your tea. I might holler till I'm hoarse, I suppose, and you wouldn't never speak. Whatever your poor pa'll say when I tell him, *I* don't know. Have your tea, do, miss, and into your bed you go.'

So little Margaret was put to bed in broad daylight, and when Mitchell had left the room the child lay awake, tossing to and fro, heaving big sighs, cogitating strange ideas that had little connection with the calm enjoyments destined for her by her father. She was not conscious that she was unhappy, for she knew no other conditions than those in which she lived. It had never occurred to her to ask why her father was unlike the father of Cecily St. Roque. Neither had it occurred to her to wonder why the people who had the charge of her were unlike the kind ladies who had the charge of Henry Bartrop's. She was but eight years old,

and she accepted the circumstances of her life as children commonly do accept circumstances. She never thought of them indeed. To her they were as inevitable as the rising and the setting of the sun. She could not have complained, even had any one opened his ear to listen. Ignorance can suffer. Knowledge only can rebel. To children, things are as they are. Margaret did not rail at her fate. But she constantly strove to evade, to negative, to annihilate the circumstances in which she languished. As one instinctively interposes a screen between his face and the fire that scorches it, or wraps himself in furs as a protection against inclement weather, so did she exercise all her ingenuity to frustrate the outcome of the rigorous rule which held her in thrall. Her intuitions were in advance of her mind, and she struggled for happiness without recognising the deadliness of her surroundings.

At this moment no little beaten and starved beggar girl was unhappier than Margaret Jermine, the heiress of Ule. Velvetine had been horrid. Mitchell had been even more horrid. But with their displeasure Margaret concerned herself little. The crooked tempers of these persons were facts to be circumvented when possible, and at all times to be disregarded. What Margaret did concern herself with was, that she had said good-bye to Henry. They had spent a long and delightful afternoon together. But now Margaret remembered that she had seen her playfellow for the last time. Before she should be freed from her lessons on the following day he would be gone. He had vaguely said that he did not know when he should return. He might perhaps stay at his grandfather's till he went to Eton.

'Don't be a goose, old girl,' he had said, when she cried. 'I shall come back some day.'

But this was small consolation. The child thought of her loss now, and it seemed to her that it was stupendous. For a time she tossed irritably upon her little bed. Then sorrow softened her heart, and she wept.

'Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do?' she kept on repeating.

The tumultuousness of her feelings found vent in strange contortions of her body, in convulsive movements, in violent sobbing. She was like one beside herself—like one upon the rack.

Some have said that the tears of childhood are soon dried, and that childish sorrows are shallow and quickly healed. Truly, the brook is only ankle deep, but it feeds the river which may close over a giant's head. A sad and tear-stained childhood leaves a deep and indelible furrow, and the forlorn griefs of children prelude the awful tragedies of manhood and womanhood. Margaret Jermine's strong and passionate hopelessness on this evening was prophetic. It bespoke an unawakened and a terrible potentiality.

Suddenly a low whistle beneath the window attracted the attention of the weeping child. She slipped out of bed, pushed aside the blind, and opened the casement. Then, standing on a chair, she looked out. Henry was below.

'Peggy, old girl!' he called softly.

'What a brick you are!' she returned in the same low tone. 'What is it, Henry dear?'

'What are you in bed for, Peggy?'

'Cause I wouldn't peach. What's up?'

'Old Pin's gone to dinner at Beaulieu, and so have Mrs. Minimy and the Minimy-my, and old Pin's left his boat on the shore, and I'm going to row out and get lilies. Will you come?'

O Henry, what a lark! Yes. I'll come in a jiffy. Wait for me at the old place.'

He nodded and she disappeared. In a moment she was huddling on her clothes, with trembling hands. Then she opened the door softly, and crept cautiously along the passage and down the wide staircase. But even had her footsteps been less wary, no one would have heard her. The little motherless girl was safe from intrusive eyes and prohibitory voices. The servants were far away, following their own pleasures. In ten minutes she was at Henry's side. He was waiting for her in the shadow of the trees at the commencement of the woodland walk, along which the funeral procession of Margaret's mother had wended its way.

'How precious long you've been!' cried the boy. 'I shouldn't have waited another second.'

'Well, I dressed like one o'clock,' gasped Margaret.

'You've been howling,' he observed. 'What for?'

'Oh, never mind,' said she. 'Mitchell's an old pig, and I hate her.'

'So do I,' acquiesced the boy. 'Come along! can you run? Here—give me your fist.'

Hand in hand, the two children scampered along the winding footway. Every now and then a dry twig snapped beneath their feet. Every now and then a bird arose at their side, and fluttered away scared. But the boy and girl darted through the deepening twilight unalarmed. When they emerged upon the shore of the mere a great brightness shone upon them; the moon was at the full. She had risen above the opposite belt of firs, and was already flooding the placid waters with a silvery splendour. Margaret clapped her hands.

'It's just like music,' she said, almost sobbing.

She was breathless with running, and the remnants of her recent sorrow were still in her heart.

'Bosh!' ejaculated Henry. 'It's full moon, and that's why we can get the lilies so well. There, jump in! Look out. Are you all right?'

'All right,' she replied. 'Isn't it jolly?'

'Yes. Are you game to steer?'

'Of course.'

She seated herself in the stern and took the ropes, the boy took the sculls.

'Now then,' he said. 'Let's go into that great patch of light to the left. The lilies are thick there. I can see them.'

'O Henry, what a game! does no one know?'

'Not a soul. Mrs. Minimy thought I was going to the rectory, but a put-off came just after she left. Then I thought I'd come and get lilies, and I thought you'd like it, old girl.'

'Oh, it's awfully jolly,' said she.

'You'll catch it, you know, if Mitchell finds out.'

'I don't care. Nobody told me not to.'

'You might thank me, Peggy. I might have come without you, you know.'

'Oh, that would have been a shame!'

'No it wouldn't. You kept me waiting half an hour.'

'Well, I couldn't help it. But thank you, Henry dear.'

Then there was a little pause. There was no sound but the dipping of the oars.

'O Henry, may we go to the island?' exclaimed Margaret suddenly.

'What for?' he asked.

'I want to.'

'But what for?'

'I want to see my mother's grave,' she said, in a subdued voice.

'Oh! Well—if you like. Yes, of course. Steer us in then. There's nobody there, you know. Old Pin's at Beaulieu.'

'I know. That's just it. I want to sit there in the moonlight by myself.'

'You funny little owl! Well, I don't mind. I'll go and poke about somewhere for a bit.'

'You can come, Henry.'

'You goose! Then you won't be in the moonlight by yourself.'

'Oh, I don't mind you, Henry. You're nobody.'

'Thank you for nothing, Peggy. Now I'll just serve you out!'

He struck the water violently with the flat of the sculls, and the drops splashed up and around.

'Hang you!' said Margaret.

'Are you wet enough, Miss Peggy?'

'Oh, hang you!' she repeated.

'Peggy, I'll throw you overboard if you talk like that. I will indeed. I will *not* be talked to as if I were a groom. What did Dr. Wheble say?'

'I don't know, and I don't care.'

'Don't care was hanged, Peggy.'

'Well, I *don't* care,' she reiterated.

'Peggy, how disgustingly unladylike you are! I'm glad I'm going to school.'

Then Margaret's bravado ceased.

'Oh please, please don't say that,' she cried. 'Oh please don't! I won't do it again. Oh, Henry dear, I do love you so.'

'You're very naughty and rude,' said Henry, stiffly.

'But I didn't mean it, Henry dear.'

'Then you shouldn't do it. I tell you Peggy, if you can't behave yourself, I won't come home for the Christmas holidays. You'd disgrace me if I brought any

other fellow home. They'd think you were I don't know what.'

'Oh, but I won't—I won't! Please—*please* don't say you won't come home at Christmas.'

'Well, don't make a hullabaloo. I'll think about it. You *must* learn to behave, you know.'

'I'll—try—to.'

'That's right, old girl. Now have done with that row. Mop your eyes, will you? Hullo! What are you doing?'

Bump! They had struck upon the island.

'I was only—trying to—get my handkerchief,' sobbed Margaret.

'Well, don't do it again,' said Henry. 'You nearly threw me off my seat. Now then, jump out, and I'll just fasten the boat. You cut off to the churchyard, and I'll yell when I'm ready, and you must come precious quick, or I shall go without you, and you'll have to wait for old Pin to bring you over.'

'Kiss me first, Henry.'

'What for?'

'Oh, I don't know! 'cause I want you to.'

'Well, I don't mind for once,' said the boy, with condescension.

And he hastily kissed the lovely little face that was upturned to his with such intense and eager affection. Then he ran off towards the modest dwelling of Pinington, and Margaret betook herself to the little churchyard.

Mrs. Jermine's grave lay in the full moonlight. A white cross was at its head, a low stone coping surrounded it. It was overgrown with the finest moss, and above the moss lay freshly-cut flowers. They were placed there almost daily by the hand of the bereaved husband. To-day they were hothouse flowers, and they yielded a rich and powerful perfume.

Margaret sat down at the foot of the grave. She liked to sit there and look at her mother's name, engraven on the white cross. She hardly knew why she liked to do this. But it made her think of her mother, and she liked to think of her. She believed that her mother was a beautiful angel in heaven, and that she held a golden harp in her hand, and played such music as her little daughter would love to hear. She did not know who had given her this idea. She had

always had it. Perhaps it had been put into her head by the nurse who had left her when she was such a little girl that she could only just remember crying and saying she could not go to sleep without Nanna. She had heard her Nanna spoken of as *that woman*.

'She used to kiss the child,' one of the servants had told another in her hearing. 'Master couldn't stand it. He can't abide them cuddling ways.'

Margaret, who thought it a beautiful event to be kissed by the Minimy-my, wished that *that woman* had remained with her. But she had gone, and sour-visaged women had come after her in succession. None of them had talked about her mother except Mitchell, who was fond of expatiating on the sorrow her poor ma would feel if she knew of Margaret's naughtiness. All her nurses had been fond of expatiating on her enormous naughtiness. One of them had told her that Almighty God did not love naughty children and would cast them into a deep pit. Margaret had asked where the pit was.

'Is it like the old saw-pit in the Bartropps woods?' she had asked.

'Oh, you ojjious child, you'll know by and by,' the servant had replied.

This nurse had soon departed, and the next had threatened a different judgment. She had asseverated that God, who had sent the she-bears to eat up the children who mocked Elisha, would send the same beasts to devour little girls who were disobedient.

'But there aren't any bears in England, and Mr. Pinington says that's not a true story,' Margaret had replied.

She was not easily daunted. But she wondered who Almighty God was, and she always thought of Him when she thought of her mother. It seemed to her that *that woman* had told her that her mother was in heaven, and that heaven was God's house. She knew nothing distinctly about God. Velvetine had once rapped her knuckles for spelling His name with a small initial letter, but that little act of tyranny had not given her much information. Sometimes Bensley adjured God to bless him, or prayed the Lord to have mercy on her (Margaret). That was when she said something that made the grooms laugh. But that again did not tell her much.

Truth to tell, Margaret thought very little about God. To her the Supreme Being was a historical character of whom she had heard in connection with the Jews, but who seemed to have become extinct since the birth of the Church. Mr. Pinington had taught her that the Bible stories were beautiful myths. No one had ever told her in sweet low tones that God is Love. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the threatened pit and the she-bears, she did not fear God. Perhaps this was because Pinington had taken such pains to disabuse her mind of all errors that she did not believe in Him. Perhaps it was because whenever she did think of Him she associated Him in her mind with her mother, who was playing on a harp of gold in heaven, which was God's house. What was her mother like? and what was God like? and heaven? Oh, if she could only be in heaven for one minute to hear the music of the golden harps! But even if she knew how to get there, would her mother play to her? Would God let her stay? Or would she be chased away to that pit? God—the only God whom she knew—had turned Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, and had drowned the whole world. But also God had led the Children of Israel out of Egypt and had cared for them in the desert. Perhaps God was not absolutely unapproachable; and if not God, perhaps not her mother either. Perhaps her mother *would* play to her after all! Oh, if she only would! But then her mother was here—in the grave—beneath the flowers and the moss. Nay, she was in heaven, with her harp in her hand. Was she not? But was she? How was it?

‘A penny for your thoughts!’ cried Henry, coming up.

Margaret started violently.

‘Oh, how you made me jump!’ she exclaimed. ‘You said you’d holler.’

‘Well, I thought I’d come, and there you sat like a statue. What were you doing, Peggy?’

‘I don’t know. I was thinking. Do tell me something, Henry dear!’

‘What?’

‘About God.’

‘About God?’ repeated the boy, uneasily. ‘Oh, no, I can’t! Little girls shouldn’t talk about God. It isn’t quite right, I think. You ought to say your prayers and be good.’

It isn't proper to talk about God. The clergyman does that in church. That's the right place to think about God in.'

'But I don't say my prayers,' Henry, and I never go to church.'

'Don't you say your prayers, Peggy? Now you really are a naughty child!'

'I'm not. Nobody ever told me.'

'Then I tell you now,' said he authoritatively. 'You're always to say your prayers, night and morning. All good people do.'

'But what sort of prayers, Henry? I don't know any.'

'You must say *Our Father*, Peggy. It's in the Prayer-book. You've got a Prayer-book, I suppose?'

'No.'

'Well, you must get one, and you'll find *Our Father* in it. That'll do you. It's not very long, and it means a lot.'

'Why is it *Our Father*?', asked the little girl.

'Because God is the Father of us all—the heavenly Father,' replied Henry.

'Oh!' said Margaret, in a disappointed tone.

'Now, Peggy, what do you mean?'

'I don't know,' said she.

She could not explain, but to her paternity meant neglect.

'You know nothing,' said the boy, contemptuously. 'You're the biggest little muff I know. Now, look out! It's getting late, and we must go and get the lilies. I mean to put them in the Minimy-my's room, as a surprise. She'll be awfully pleased. Look sharp! Hurry up, can't you? Why, what's the matter, old girl? Your clothes are coming off! What's that all round your feet?'

'It's only my flannel petticoat, Henry dear,' said Margaret. 'I was in such a dickens of a hurry, you know. Just you run on, and I'll put it right in no time.'

She did this and followed him quickly. But the young mentor would not let the incident pass.

'You're the untidiest little rat I ever saw!' he said, when she rejoined him. 'Now, *do* you suppose I could ask an Eton fellow to associate with you? I ask you, Peggy, *do* you suppose an Eton fellow ever saw a flannel petticoat in his life? Why, he wouldn't believe his eyes! It's perfectly disgraceful. Of course, it doesn't matter about me, but if any other fellow were to know of such a thing—why, I expect he wouldn't know which way to look!'

'Oh, Henry dear, I'm so awfully sorry,' murmured Margaret. 'It's never happened before, you know.'

'But other things have,' retorted the boy. 'You're always untidy. I've heard Mrs. Minimy say so. And you've got a scratch on your face, and your hands are like sweep's. It's quite disgusting. There now, don't begin watering. I've only told you the plain truth.'

'But I can't bear you to be angry with me,' whimpered she.

'Then you should behave properly,' said he. 'Now shut up, and take the ropes and steer me to the lilies. And don't let me ever see your flannel petticoat again. I'm quite ashamed of you!'

Margaret offered no further extenuation of her offence. She felt infinitely crestfallen. To have sunk in Henry's estimation was terrible to her. He had never spoken so sternly before. Certainly now he would not come home for the Christmas holidays. Repressing her tears with difficulty she steered in the direction of the lilies. Henry plied his sculls in silence. But he could not be happy while his little playmate was dull.

'I say, Peggy,' he began at last.

'Yes, Henry,' responded she, in a subdued tone.

'I say, Peggy, don't make a shindy. Stop howling, there's a good girl. I didn't mean to howl you right over. I know I'm rather a beast to you sometimes. But you see it's because you're a girl. If you were a boy, I should just knock you down and there'd be an end. But I can't lick a girl. Can I now?'

'No,' acquiesced she.

'So you see I *must* blow you up. *Don't* you see?' he went on.

'Yes,' she agreed.

'Then cheer up, old girl' he said. 'Come now, *do!* You know I love you,' he added persuasively.

In an instant the child had dropped the tiller-ropes, and had thrown herself upon her knees at his feet and was clasping his neck.

'Oh, Henry dear, Henry dear,' she sobbed, convulsively. 'I love you so! I do love you so! I'll never do anything you don't like any more, if only you'll love me!'

The boy was touched, and he kissed her several times.

‘There, there,’ he said kindly. ‘Of course I love you.’

Then he felt the sculls slipping out of his hands, and he began to feel ashamed of having shown so much feeling.

‘Come now, that’ll do,’ he cried impatiently. ‘Look out for the sculls, you little goose! There—I’ve lost it! No—here it is! Mind, Peggy. You don’t want to stay on the mere all night I suppose? There now! Do let’s get to the lilies!’

‘But you *do* love me, Henry dear?’ said Margaret, wistfully.

‘Of course I do, you little simpleton! Don’t ask such silly questions. Now for the lilies! Wait a moment, while I ship the sculls. Now then! you sit quiet, Peggy. Don’t you move or you’ll tip the boat over, and you’ll be drowned. What a lot there are! I should like to get dozens.’

But the gathering of water-lilies is not an easy matter. The plants are deep-rooted, and their stalks are very tough.

Henry tugged at flower after flower. But he tugged in vain. More than once he nearly capsized the boat.

‘Can’t you sit still, I tell you, Peggy?’ he said each time.

But the little girl never moved. She watched him intently. By and by he got out his knife, bared his arms, and tried to cut the thick stalks under the water. But neither did this device succeed. The knife was blunt.

‘It’ll be an awful sell if we can’t get any after all,’ he remarked. ‘I wish you’d keep quiet, Peggy. You always jerk the boat just when I’ve got a good hold.’

‘I didn’t move,’ said Margaret.

‘Oh, don’t make excuses,’ cried he impatiently. ‘Now then! This one I *will* have!’

He made a superhuman effort, and the lily-root gave way. With a sudden rebound Henry fell backwards. The boat lurched. Margaret uttered a little cry.

‘Hold your tongue,’ cried the boy. ‘It’s all right. Look, Peggy! Look what a stunner! It’s worth the trouble, isn’t it?’

Margaret shivered. She was splashed from head to foot.

‘Let’s go back now,’ she said. ‘You’ve got one.’

‘But I want a lot.’

‘Oh, Henry dear, I’m so wet.’

‘So am I. It doesn’t matter. Sit still, old girl.’

She sat still again and watched him patiently. But further efforts proved useless. The lilies held fast.

'Let's row back and try nearer shore,' suggested Margaret. 'They might come easier in another place.'

Henry agreed, and he unshipped the sculls and rowed to land. Margaret shivered again. Then she yawned.

'You're sleepy, old girl,' said Henry. 'I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll just put you on shore, and you can cut off home and tumble into bed, and I'll get the lilies by myself.'

She made no demur, and the boat ran ashore. Almost at that moment they heard a halloo. Somebody was coming through the wood and shouting.

'It's old Pin coming home,' whispered Henry. 'Be quick, Peggy, be quick! Spring out, and hide behind a tree!'

Margaret got up as he bade her and sprang. But in the uncertain light, with her wet garments clinging about her, and half asleep, she jumped and missed the bank. There was a great splash and a faint cry—the little girl was in the water.

'Hallo, hallo!' cried the voice in the wood, and a man came running. It was not Pinington. The party at Beaulieu had not yet broken up. It was Bensley.

'Hallo! Who's there?' he called out. 'Why, Master Henry! Good Lord!'

'Oh, she's in, she's in!' cried Henry. 'Help me to get her out! She's in, I tell you. Be quick!'

'*What?*' shouted the servant. 'In! Miss Margaret! Good God!'

'There's her dress!' exclaimed the boy. 'Quick! She'll be under the boat!'

'Good God!' said Bensley again.

Then he plunged into the water. It was above his waist, but there was no current, and he was able to stand firm, and in a moment he had grasped Margaret's frock. Then he brought her to land, and laid her upon the grass. She was very pale. In the moonlight her face looked death-like. Henry threw himself upon her. He was beside himself with terror, with grief, with remorse.

'She is drowned—she is dead!' he cried wildly.

And he kissed her unresponsive lips over and over again. But she was not drowned. Her immersion had been of so

brief duration that she was only unconscious for a few moments. Then she opened her eyes.

'Why, Henry!' she said in surprise.

Her voice was faint. She was still quite white. But she had spoken. She was alive. The boy was almost mad with joy.

'O Peggy, Peggy, I'm so glad! O Peggy, old girl, I'm so glad,' he kept on repeating.

'Mercy on us, Master Henry, she's as wet as a fish,' interrupted Bensley. 'There's a fine harum-scarum a-goin' on at the house. S'pose it's Mr. Pininton's boat, ain't it? I'll jest put it back, and come along for missy. You wait here. I'll be back in two jiffs.'

The two children were left alone. Henry knelt beside Margaret, clasping her cold hand.

'I'm awfully sorry, Henry dear,' murmured she.

'It was all my fault,' said he.

'No, no! It was all mine. But I couldn't jump. I *did* try. But I'm so confoundedly tired. Oh, I beg your pardon, Henry dear!'

But he forbore to reprimand her.

'Never mind, dear old girl,' he said. 'Were you hurt? Do you feel rather drowned?'

'No, no. I don't feel anything when you speak like that. I do love you so, Henry dear.'

'I'm sure I love you like anything, Peggy. I thought I don't know what when I saw you go overboard.'

'Oh, Henry dear!'

'I did. I thought you were drowned.'

'Did you?'

'And I was awfully sorry I'd rowed you about your flannel petticoat.'

'Were you really?'

'*Awfully!* I felt as if I'd killed you. You won't think about it any more, will you, Peggy?'

'Oh, no! You shall never see it again, Henry dear.'

'And of course I didn't mean that about the Eton fellows, Peggy. They'd like to know you, because you never funk. Cecily would have screeched like a parrot when I rocked the boat. You're sure you're not angry with me, old girl?'

'No, no! I don't mind anything now you love me.'

Then Bensley came hurrying back, and he took Margaret up in his arms and prepared to carry her to the house.

'Jest you run on and tell Mitchell what's happened, Master Henry,' he said. 'And jest you tell her to get a hot tub ready. Miss Margaret's near froze to death, and she'll be took mortal bad if we don't look sharp.'

Henry needed no urging. He was thankful to be called into active service, and he sped towards the house with the utmost celerity. Bensley, holding his burden tenderly, followed more slowly.

'Bensley,' said Margaret.

'Yes, missy.'

'How did you know where we were?'

'I didn't know nothing, missy. We all runned different ways, and I come this here blessed way.'

'But how did any one know anything?'

'Why, missy, Mitchell she gone up and found your bed empty. She comed down all in a heap like, a-scritching like a owl. Lord, how she did scritch! And then, by George, we all took and runned! Don't you ever go to play such a trick agin, missy. It made my heart go all over my body, it did, when I see your frock a-floatin'.'

'Oh, Bensley, I'm awfully sorry!'

'It'd a broke my heart, missy, if you'd a been drowned.'

'Oh, Bensley, I'm so sorry!'

Then the house was reached, and Margaret was carried up stairs and put into a warm bath, and all the maids gathered round, and Mitchell scolded, and the other servants pitied. But Margaret paid no heed, and answered no questions. She was worn out with fatigue and excitement.

'There, go to sleep, do!' said Mitchell, at last, standing over her bed. 'You're a very naughty little girl, and whatever will become of you I don't know. But I'll tell your poor pa to-morrow, as sure as I'm born, and if he's not fit to break his heart, I don't know who is! Good-night, Miss Margaret; I wonder you dare to rejoice in such doings.'

But little Margaret did not rejoice in her doings. Instead thereof, she went to sleep and dreamed horribly.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Margaret awoke the next day, her head ached and her legs felt heavy. But she said nothing, and got up at Mitchell's bidding. She did not complain of the pain in her head or of the fatigue in her limbs. But a fretfulness, unusual to her, seemed to have sprung up within her during the night. She exclaimed peevishly when Mitchell drew a string around her waist. She was cross when the servant combed her tangled hair.

'I never did see such a cantankerous child,' said Mitchell. 'I wonder you're not ashamed of yourself—that I do. Your poor pa's half breaking his heart, *I* do expect.'

'Does he know?' asked Margaret.

'I can't say, Miss Margaret,' replied Mitchell. 'It isn't my place to go telling tales to a gentleman like that. I'm just waiting for Miss Velvetine, and you'll turn pale when she marches to your poor pa, *I* do expect. Whatever he'll say, *I* can't think. If I was him, I know what I'd do!'

She looked at Margaret with little pity. But the child did not inquire what it was that Mitchell would do were she metamorphosed into Mr. Jermine.

'*I* should try a good whipping,' said Mitchell, after a pause.

Still Margaret made no observation.

'A good whipping to bring you to your seven senses,' continued Mitchell. 'The idea of your getting up, when you'd been put to bed, and expected to stop there! It gave me such a turn, I might have fallen down in a fit. How ever you dared, Miss Margaret, *I* can't tell. You're a very naughty little girl, and it's a miracle you haven't been and broke your poor pa's heart long ago.'

'Oh, *don't* pull me so !' cried Margaret, irritably. 'Give me the comb.'

'No, miss,' said Mitchell, holding the article in question above Margaret's head. 'I shall do my duty, and that *I* do assure you. Stand still, do, Miss Margaret ! You're that contrary, if this wasn't an enlightened generation and me an eddicated person, *I* should say you was a changeling !'

Then she fastened Margaret's frock and let her go. Breakfast was ready, and Mitchell sat down to it with avidity. But Margaret could not eat. She drank her milk eagerly, but the porridge, the fried bacon, the bread and butter, all of which Mitchell offered her in turn, she could not touch. The *eddicated person* thought that the child was obstinate.

'There, go along, do !' she said at last. 'It's all your bad, ugly temper, and that's what it is. You're a naughty girl, and I sha'n't take no more trouble about you. Starving don't hurt naughty children, *I* dare to say.'

So Margaret left the table, and tried to play upon the piano. But her arms felt as heavy as her legs, and it seemed as if some weight inside her head kept banging to and fro. She could not play. She went across the room, and threw herself down upon the couch. Mitchell looked at her scornfully.

'Shamming !' she observed aloud. 'Doesn't want to do no lessons to-day. *I* never did !'

Then she went down stairs to meet Miss Velvetine, and to enter a formal complaint against Miss Margaret.

When Flora heard of the occurrences of the previous evening she felt that fortune was smiling upon her. This was indeed a reason for seeking an interview with Jermine, and she decided at once to take advantage of it. She desired Mitchell to inquire if Mr. Jermine were at liberty, and in a few minutes she was ushered into his presence. She entered the sanctum with an air of composure. In her dealings with Jermine she always strove to appear perfectly calm. She opined that to please a philosopher one must cultivate a philosophic attitude. Flora, however, was not philosophic to the core.

'I was so thankful I'd put on a clean print, my dear,' she told Blanche in the afternoon. 'It was quite a chance—a providence, I should say. I so seldom put on a clean print in the middle of the week. And I had a rose-bud in my

brooch, and my best boots on. I looked very nice. That striped print with the waist-band suits me so well. I'm glad it wasn't the blue spotted dress.'

Jermine rose at Flora's entrance. He smiled and held out his hand.

'I hope you reached home safely last night, and were not tired,' he said.

'Thank you,' she replied demurely. 'No, I was not tired. It was a pleasant evening, and I enjoyed it. I am sorry to come to you this morning with a complaint on my lips.'

'A complaint!' he repeated.

Without circumlocution, Flora repeated the tale of Margaret's delinquencies—of how she had been put to bed early as a punishment for rudeness to her maid, of how she had slipped out unawares and gone on the mere with Henry Bartrop's, and of how she had terminated her escapade by falling into the water. Flora's voice was calm and incisive. She exhibited no sign of feeling. Jermine's eyes were fixed upon her attentively.

'This accounts for the state in which Mr. Pinington found his boat last night,' he remarked. 'I walked to the mere with him, and we found the boat deluged with water, and with a water-lily lying in the stern. We thought some village boy had been trespassing.'

'I am afraid that Margaret sees more of Henry Bartrop's, and is fonder of him, than I had imagined,' said Flora.

'With your co-operation, I shall be able to remedy that,' said Jermine.

'I am entirely at your service,' she rejoined.

Then there was a slight pause.

'What do you wish me to do with regard to the affair of last night?' asked Jermine.

What did she wish him to do! Flora's heart leapt.

'What would you think it desirable to do?' she said, demurely.

'I do not see the grounds upon which I can censure the child,' said Jermine. 'Her virtual disobedience was to Mitchell, and no doubt Mitchell has already scolded her sufficiently. I cannot punish so juvenile an offender for an escapade—which could not have taken place had my vigilance been more ample—simply because its consequences might have been grave.'

Flora was disappointed. But she retained her outward composure.

'You do not appear to see that this escapade is only one of many, all of which Margaret shares with Henry Bartropps,' she observed. 'Her association with him is probably fostering the emotional side of her character.'

'I am aware of that, Miss Velvetine. I am sorry that she has formed a friendship for this boy. But she is young, and he will not linger in her memory.'

Flora looked at him inquiringly.

'I mean,' he added, 'that I have already devised means for causing young Bartropps to pass out of her life.'

'And will you not tell her so?'

'No. I shall not inflict punishment upon her because I have been unwary. Besides, to speak to her of her companion would be to defeat my own end. I wish her to forget him. If he is made an active cause of vexation to her, the idea of him will become permanently fixed in her mind. Nothing so quickly embodies and vitalises a thought as to speak of it. I must beg, Miss Velvetine, that Henry Bartropps is never mentioned to Margaret.'

Flora assented. But she seemed reluctant to depart.

'Is there anything more that you wish to say?' asked Jermine.

'I am sorry to appear harsh,' replied she. 'But I must beg you—for my sake—to take some notice of this affair. Margaret knows that I have informed you of her insubordination, and it will destroy my authority if you ignore that she has behaved ill.'

'Then what do you wish me to do?' said Jermine again.

'I should wish you to see Margaret, and——'

'I cannot punish her,' said Jermine quickly.

'No. I was not going to suggest punishment. But can you not make it a personal matter between yourself and her, that she should implicitly obey the people whom you set over her? Can you not so speak that a recurrence of acts of lawlessness—such as those that took place last night—shall be rendered impossible?'

Jermine seemed to meditate.

'Margaret has a strong and wilful spirit,' resumed Flora. 'Every time that her wilfulness asserts itself, her emotional

side triumphs, and the growth of her mental tranquillity is retarded.'

'But why should I see her, Miss Velvetine?'

'Because I believe that a few words from you would carry great weight. You are anxious that Margaret should cultivate a quiet mind. Will you not show her that she can only gain your approval by quelling her wild and boisterous impulses?'

A silence of two or three minutes ensued. Then Flora rose. Jermine started.

'I will uphold your authority, Miss Velvetine,' he said. 'To do this, I will speak to Margaret, and lay a slight penance upon her. Please send her to me. I will tell her that I am aware of her misdemeanour, and when Mr. Pinington arrives, I will come up stairs with him, and Margaret shall make him an apology for having used his boat.'

With this concession Flora was compelled to be content. She was, indeed, only half pleased, for she had desired that Margaret should be severely punished. Still, it was something that, at her instigation, Jermine was about to hold an interview with his child. And she smiled as she dwelt upon the thought that her influence with Margaret's father was growing.

Jermine sighed when he was left alone. He had no relish for the task which lay before him. True, he had used the utmost ingenuity to arrange that his child should be brought up without tenderness. But hitherto he had had no personal share in her bringing up. He had, indeed, scarcely ever seen her, and he had never spoken to her. But he thought of her much, and he could not forget that he had idolised her mother. He had never allowed himself to entertain a feeling of affection for his daughter. Nevertheless the idea of speaking harshly to her was strangely repugnant to him. Moreover, he was unused to children, and he hardly knew how to frame his admonition. He began to wish that he had not sent for Margaret until he should have inquired of Pinington how far she was advanced mentally. He wished earnestly that Miss Velvetine had not come to him. He began to wonder why he had acceded to her urgent wish that her little pupil should be reprimanded by him. While he was thus meditating there came a knock at the door.

‘Come in,’ he said.

And Margaret entered. A red spot burned on each of her cheeks. Her eyes were bright. Her soft, curly hair fell about her face in disorder. She paused upon the threshold.

‘Shut the door, Margaret, and come here,’ said Jermine.

She obeyed him without a word, and slowly approached the table where he sat. She was awed by the strangeness of the situation. Jermine rose instinctively. Child as she was, her beauty forbade him to remain seated while she stood. He looked upon her with an agitation which was foreign to him. Strange feelings arose within him. A longing seized him to take her in his arms and kiss her. A great passion sprang up in his heart, and in a moment he knew that he loved the forlorn and beautiful child. But he would not suffer himself to be conquered. The philosopher strove with the father, and prevailed. Yet he could not think of anything to say. It seemed to him ridiculous and inappropriate that he should find fault with this child at all. For several minutes he was silent. At last he said, ‘I understand, Margaret, that you were guilty of great impropriety of conduct last night. You comported yourself rebelliously towards the person whom I have placed in charge of you by quitting your room after she had consigned you to rest for the night. You thereupon sought amusement in an illegitimate way, with a companion not of my choosing, and finally you so far transgressed the laws of order as to possess yourself of the property of Mr. Pinington to further your designs. Although in none of these actions have you rebelled against me personally, I cannot but express my annoyance at these breaches of discipline on your part. Have you anything to answer to these charges?’

He looked at her fixedly. But she could not frame a syllable of response. His grave voice, and the measured and grandiloquent accents in which he spoke, had augmented her natural awe. She was petrified with terror.

‘Speak, little girl,’ said Jermine.

He had no idea that he terrified her. He sought to repel her. But he had no desire to be cruel, and he did not know that he was causing her an agony of suffering. Her breath came and went quickly. But she could not speak. The weight in her head banged to and fro more and more pain-

fully, and now that she was required to stand it seemed as if her whole body were heavy. She raised her eyes to her father's face deprecatingly, and her lip trembled. Her wan and plaintive air touched him, and he could not entirely stifle the nature within him. He stooped down and took her hand in his. It was hot, and it seemed to burn his. He let it go suddenly.

'Do not be afraid to speak to me, Margaret,' he said. 'Say anything you wish.'

To his amazement she burst into tears.

'My dear child,' he said helplessly, 'why do you cry? What is it?'

But she could not explain. Children cannot tell their griefs. It is divine art that reads the cause of a child's tear.

'Little girl, you mustn't cry like this,' said Jermine. 'I am not angry with you. I am only distressed that you should be so wanting in self-control, in self-discipline, that you should take pleasure in things which are not fruitful of real happiness. I want you to be happy, Margaret. Are you happy?'

'I don't know,' she said, still sobbing violently.

'You don't know? Don't you know what it is to feel quite peaceful—quite untroubled?'

'I don't know,' she reiterated.

'I want you to be happy, Margaret.'

But she sobbed on.

'I want you to be happy, little girl,' he repeated. 'I am doing all in my power to ensure your future happiness. You must believe me, Margaret, because I am your father.'

Still she wept. It was *now*, and she was a lonely, miserable little girl.

'What makes you cry?' he asked, puzzled. 'You say you don't know what makes you feel happy. But you know what gives you pleasure, don't you? Tell me, little girl, what you like best?'

'Henry.'

'And what else?'

'The Minimy-my and Bensley.'

'The Minimy-my! Who on earth is that? And Bensley!'

'Oh, by George!' muttered Margaret, retreating a few paces.

Her father gazed at her curiously.

'Did you say *by George?*' he asked.

She did not speak.

'Who is the Minimy-my?'

Margaret stared at him.

'Do you mean Miss Minimy?'

She nodded.

'Who taught you to say *by George?*'

'Bensley says it.'

'And do you like Miss Velvetine?'

'No.'

'Well, these are people,' he said. 'But what do you like *doing?*'

'I like my music, and I like the new pony,' replied Margaret.

'You like music and riding,' said Jermine, reflectively.

'Don't you like reading?'

'Sometimes.'

'Don't you like your lessons with Mr. Pinington?'

'Yes.'

'And do you like— What's the matter, my child?' he cried abruptly.

She had staggered, and would have fallen. But he caught her and supported her. Almost unconsciously he pressed her to him.

'What is it?' he said.

'I don't know.'

'Were you giddy, little girl?'

'I don't know.'

'You don't feel well, my child?'

She began to cry again.

'Don't cry,' he said. 'I am not angry, and I am not going to punish you. You must tell Mr. Pinington you are sorry you took the liberty of using his boat. That is all. Don't cry. You don't look well, and you had better go and lie down. Give my compliments to Miss Velvetine, and beg her to let you do as you like till Mr. Pinington comes. Then I shall come up stairs with him, and you must make him an apology. You may go now. And don't cry, little girl!'

When she had gone Jermine turned to his writing with a profound sigh. But his usual occupation failed to interest him. He could not disengage his thoughts from the child who had been so nearly drowned the night before, and who looked so ill this morning. Her wistful eyes haunted him. They were like his wife's eyes. But in his wife's eyes he had never seen so pathetic and imploring an expression. For a moment he wondered how his wife would have brought up their child if it had been he who had been taken and she who had been spared. Instinctively, he felt sure that the mother and daughter would have walked hand in hand. And then death would have stricken one, and the other would have been left mourning.

'I am wise,' he muttered.

But he groaned. At that moment he would have given his life to win Margaret's love.

He was glad when Pinington arrived, and he went forth to meet him.

'I have found out who used your boat,' he said. 'The little culprit is up stairs, and I am going to make her apologise to you.'

'Oh, pray don't, Jermine,' said Pinington, nervously twisting his hands together. 'It didn't the least signify. Pray don't!'

'I must, because I've said it,' returned Jermine. 'I have never punished my daughter before, and I really don't think that this punishment can be called extreme.'

So the two men ascended to the schoolroom. Miss Velvetine sat there knitting. Margaret was lying on the couch. She raised her eyelids when the door opened. But she did not move. The weight that banged to and fro in her head made her feel stupid, almost as if she were not herself. She had looked at Velvetine, sitting there with her thin lips compressed and her forehead in lines, and she had thought she looked like Medusa, and had watched painfully to see if a snake should show its head above her trimly-arranged hair. While she was watching the weight in her head seemed to enlarge, and the banging to and fro to become worse. Then she shut her eyes. It seemed to her that she could bear the banging better when she did not see Velvetine.

Jermine and Pinington came into the room, and

immediately Miss Velvetine's lips were parted in a smile, and the lines went out of her forehead. Jermine went towards the couch.

'Here is Mr. Pinington, Margaret,' he said. 'Will you ask his pardon for having used his boat?'

'Get up, Margaret,' said Flora, approaching them.

Margaret obeyed. But she could not stand. She sat down again on the edge of the couch.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Pinington,' she said, tremulously. 'I didn't mean to—I——'

Then she burst into fresh tears.

'Oh, don't cry, don't cry!' exclaimed Pinington.

He was greatly distressed. He had never seen her cry before. To him, she was always bright and intelligent.

'What *is* the matter, Margaret?' cried Flora.

'Don't cry, little girl,' said Jermine.

Then came a loud knock at the door.

'Come in,' said Flora sharply.

And in rushed Henry.

'Oh!' he ejaculated, stopping short.

'What do you want here?' asked Flora, irritably. 'This is lesson-time, Henry.'

'I came to see if Peggy was all right,' said the boy. 'And I came to see you, Mr. Pinington, because I thought you might be angry about your boat, and I knew Peggy wouldn't peach. I took it. It was all my fault.'

'Never mind about the boat,' said Pinington, scratching his head. 'I don't care a bit. You didn't do it any harm. Pray, pray, Miss Velvetine, don't let Margaret cry. I can't bear it.'

'You haven't been angry with Peggy, have you?' said the boy, looking suspiciously at Flora. 'It was all my fault. I took her on the mere, and I splashed her, and I told her to jump, and she couldn't, and so she got a ducking. It was all me. And I knew she'd never peach.' She never does. And that's why I came, sir.'

'Well, it doesn't matter,' said Pinington, rubbing his hands. 'Bless my soul, as if water could hurt a boat! Of course I'm not angry. Dear me, I wish she'd stop crying! It makes me quite ill to see a child cry. Come, don't cry, Margaret! We'll do some nice lessons, if only you'll stop crying.'

'Dry your eyes, Margaret,' said Flora.

But Margaret could not stop crying.

'Let me,' said Henry.

He sat down beside her, put his arm around her, and patted and coaxed her. For a moment he forgot that other people were looking on. He had not yet forgotten the misery of his soul when he had thought, a few hours before, that his little playmate was drowned.

'Don't cry, don't cry, Peggy,' he kept on saying.

'Mr. Jermine, you see,' said Flora, in a low and significant tone.

'It's all stuff,' cried Pinington. 'What does it matter? What can you be thinking of, Jermine? If any one is to blame, it's Henry. I wonder you could think of such a thing, Henry, as to take Margaret on to the mere all by yourself at night. Why, you might have upset the boat and drowned her! But it's sheer folly to blame the child. My dear little girl, for heaven's sake, don't cry? Miss Velvetine, do say something.'

'You see how it is, Mr. Jermine,' said Flora again.

'Henry dear,' whispered Margaret.

'Yes, old girl.'

'Oh, Henry dear, my head aches so. There's a bell ringing inside it.'

'Nonsense, Peggy! Don't be a goose.'

'But it does. It hurts so.'

'Was it falling into the water, Peggy?'

'Oh no! I didn't mind that.'

'Well then, don't cry. It'll be better soon. You must look sharp and get rid of your headache, because I'm not going to grandpapa's after all, and we can have some jolly larks. Why, Peggy, old girl!'

'Oh, I couldn't help it! It's my head,' she murmured, closing her eyes.

'What was it?' asked Pinington, bending over her. 'What made you cry out?'

'She says it's her head, sir,' said Henry.

'Jermine, the child is ill,' said Pinington.

'Shall I fetch the doctor?' asked Henry.

'Yes,' replied Jermine. 'Run and tell Bensley to fetch Dr. Wheble.'

Then Pinington put Margaret gently on the couch and

sat beside her, holding her hand, and Jermine stood by, sad and anxious.

‘I am not surprised that Margaret is unwell,’ observed Flora. ‘Fright, exposure, damp, unusual hours—all combined are likely to cause physical disturbance.’

But neither of the gentlemen heeded her. And presently Dr. Wheble arrived, and a sick-nurse was sent for, and there were no more lessons at Ule for many days.

CHAPTER VII.

EVERY one came to Mrs. Minimy's party on the following Saturday. She and her daughter were general favourites, and although the two ladies made no great effort towards entertaining their guests, a general sense of good-humour and geniality pervaded the atmosphere. Refreshments abounded. There was archery in a field, and croquet and Badminton on the lawn. Above all, the hostesses were always smiling.

'I never saw such a woman as Mrs. Minimy,' said Mrs. Velvetine to Mrs. Ife. 'She is for ever on the broad grin. I wonder she doesn't get tired!'

'She is a delightful creature,' returned Mrs. Ife. 'I wonder if she has always been happy.'

'Of course,' said Mrs. Velvetine, spitefully. 'She has no depth, and shallow people are always happy. That's why Blanche is so much happier than my daughter. Flora looks forward. She foresees, and that makes her anxious. Blanche Minimy is a mere kitten. She thinks of nothing.'

'She is a very sweet girl,' observed Mrs. Ife. 'I hope Mr. St. Roque will make her happy.'

'Are they engaged?' asked Mrs. Velvetine.

'Not that I have been told. But I suppose there is no doubt that the engagement will take place,' said Mrs. Ife.

'I am surprised that a man like Mr. St. Roque should think of a chit like Blanche Minimy,' said Mrs. Velvetine. 'I consider her quite the acme of silliness and frivolity. She is not at all fitted to be the wife of a public man. Flora sees a good deal of Mr. Jermin, and she knows what *he* thinks about silly girls.'

'Mr. Jermine is very peculiar,' said Mrs. Ife. 'I don't think he is a criterion as to what men like or dislike.'

'He is a very sensible man, and if he were to take it into his head to marry again, there would be nothing disagreeable in his wife's position,' said Mrs. Velvetine. 'He rules his child with a rod of iron, and keeps her in her place. Now Mr. St. Roque spoils his children scandalously. I wouldn't allow *my* daughter to marry such a widower. I'm sure I wish Blanche Minimy joy of the little horrors. Mr. St. Roque was very attentive to Flora when first we came to Gladestreet. But I discouraged the idea.'

'But your daughter was engaged!' said Mrs. Ife.

At that moment, Flora was shaking hands with Mr. Jermine. He had not failed to keep his promise of coming to Mrs. Minimy's party.

'And how is Margaret?' inquired Flora.

'Thank you. I believe she is going on very well,' he replied. 'Will you take a turn through the shrubberies with me?' he continued. 'A gathering of this kind wearies me inexpressibly. Society becomes appalling when one is unaccustomed to it. It seems to me a pity that the gregariousness of the human race is so greatly encouraged. Its gregariousness is not its greatest beauty, or its wisest instinct, or even its noblest pleasure. Society is absolutely unsatisfying. One withdraws from an assemblage such as the present, without having experienced a moment's gratification.'

Flora had been elated at his invitation to her to walk with him through the shrubberies. But his latter remarks chilled her slightly.

'Of course there is very little pleasure in general society,' she admitted after a pause. 'But sometimes in particular companionship——'

'Ah, Miss Velvetine, you are like the rest of the world. You pin your faith on duality. If men are to mix, let it at least be in numbers. The association of two precedes sorrow.'

'Pardon me, Mr. Jermine. Not if the two are wise—not if they look at things in a right light.'

'But is it possible that two can be associated without the dread of a future pain? You must not forget that, with the idea of twain, comes the inevitable idea of separation.'

'It seems to me a mistake to dread separation,' said Flora. 'None should dread it but those who give way to intense passion. And surely intense passion is folly. The very fact of the inevitableness of separation seems to forbid it.'

'I am glad to hear you say this, Miss Velvetine. It gives me hope that my philosophy will meet your favour.'

'It ought to do so,' said she.

'Thank you. It pleases me that you approve.'

'You are very good to say so, Mr. Jermine.'

At this juncture they met Cleve.

'I have been looking for you high and low, Flora,' he said.

'Did you want anything particular?' she asked, coldly.

Jermine lifted his hat and moved away.

'Of course, I always want you, dear,' said Cleve.

'You interrupted me at a very inopportune moment,' she said. 'I wish you wouldn't always run after me. Because we are, in a sort of way, engaged, is no reason——'

'In a *sort* of way!' he interrupted. 'I don't understand.'

'Oh, don't torment me, Lucius! You do cavil so at every thing I say. I meant you interrupted me when I was enjoying a really intellectual conversation. It was very tiresome of you.'

'But you wouldn't rather talk to Mr. Jermine than to me, dear? *We* are engaged to each other, you know.'

Oh, yes! I know that only too well. You don't seem to see things as I do, Lucius.'

'No, I don't,' he said.

'It's a pity you can't be sensible, like Regie Dryad. He has agreed to leave Blanche Minimy quite alone till Christmas.'

'But he isn't engaged to her, Flora!'

'Engaged! How you do keep on about being engaged! As if when a girl of seventeen says a thing she must necessarily mean it!'

'I consider we are engaged, Flora!'

'Do you?'

'I do. Don't you?'

She did not reply.

'Don't you?' he repeated.

'I *have* to consider it so, because you make such a fuss about it,' she said.

'But, my dear, a thing *is* or it is *not*. When a man asks a girl to marry him and she says yes, is it, or is it not, an engagement?'

'When a *man* makes an offer, Lucius, yes! But when a mere boy——'

'I was three-and-twenty, Flora.'

'When a mere boy,' she repeated, 'a Government clerk on a hundred a year——'

'A hundred and fifty,' he interposed.

'Oh, do not be so aggravating, Lucius!' she cried. 'You don't know how you annoy me. As if it wasn't bad enough to be engaged to you at all, without your teasing——'

'*What!*' exclaimed he.

His tone startled her, and she looked at him. His face was white, and his usually calm features were distorted by the violence of his feelings. But the woman who was in sympathy with Jermine felt no compunction.

'Don't!' she said, petulantly.

'Yes, yes!' he cried, excitedly. 'I must have an end of this. I can bear it no longer. You don't love me. You are tired of me. Well, I will weary you no longer! Do you think I would marry you against your will? By Heaven, *no!* Let us break off our engagement. You shall be bound to me no longer. Here is the locket you gave me!'

His strong fingers snapped the little ornament off his watch-chain in a moment. He held it out to her.

'Take it,' he said.

'You are very rude,' said Flora, pushing his hand away.

'No, I am not rude—I am kind,' he returned hotly. 'You are tired of me, and I release you. Go your way. Marry whom you will. You have the satisfaction of knowing that you have hurt me to the bottom of my heart. But you shall be free. Take it. Take the thing, I say!'

'Oh, hush, Lucius!' she cried. 'You will make people talk. Don't you see here are Mr. St. Roque and Blanche!'

'I don't care,' he said. 'I am sick of all this. Take it, and marry any one you please. Take it, Miss Velvetine,' he added, in a stern and commanding voice.

Flora felt impelled to obey him.

'Well, I don't choose to make a scene,' she said.

And she took the trinket and slipped it into her pocket.

St. Roque and Blanche came up eagerly. Both were smiling. Blanche's cheeks were flushed.

'O Flora!' she murmured.

'How do you do, Miss Velvetine?' cried St. Roque. 'She has made me so happy.'

'O Flora dear!' said Blanche. 'Oh, you don't know! And yet you do, because of Mr. Cleve. Oh, I am so sorry we have driven him away! Why did he go? O Mr. St. Roque! O Flora, can you guess?'

'She has made me the happiest of men. She has promised to be my wife,' said St. Roque proudly.

'I can't think where Blanche has disappeared to,' Mrs. Minimy was saying to Lady Mary. 'I haven't seen her for the last hour.'

'Oh, she's all right,' rejoined Lady Mary. 'I saw her go off with my son. He'll take care of her. What's this I hear about the child at Ule?'

'Dear little thing!' ejaculated Mrs. Minimy. 'I'm afraid she's really ill. It happened that evening we all dined with you, and I rather regard it as my fault. You see, Henry was alone. Of course, I had arranged amusement for him. But it fell through, and he went to Ule and took Margaret out, and actually took her on the mere. And the poor little tender darling fell into the water, and was within an ace of being drowned, only providentially she was pulled out. I feel so grieved about it.'

'Oh, she'll be all right,' said Lady Mary. 'A child can bear a great deal. A good soaking doesn't hurt. I wish to goodness it had been Cecily—little scaramouche! It would have kept her quiet for a week or two, and that would have been an enormous blessing. Now, I'll just tell you what to do, Mrs. Minimy. If a certain desirable event should take place, do you have that monkey sent off to school. The boys don't matter. They're good enough without their sister. She's a thousand pickles in one. But don't send her to school in London. If you do, I warn you I will *not* have her out on Saturdays.'

'My dear Lady Mary, you really make me blush!' said Mrs. Minimy.

'Oh, nonsense, my dear good soul,' cried Lady Mary. 'There's no need to blush about a straightforward thing like

a marriage. I never see the object of reticence. I always say what I think when I think it. Some people bide their time, take opportunities, seize convenient occasions. They call it tact. I call it bosh. I don't care a fig about tact. What I want is my own way. It's best for every one. So as I've thought of this I say it. And I repeat it—not to make you blush, Mrs. Minimy, but that there may be no mistake about it in the future—if Cecily is sent to school in London I decline altogether to have her out on half-holidays.'

'She isn't really naughty, Lady Mary,' said Mrs. Minimy deprecatingly. 'What she wants is attention. I own it distresses me to see the way she goes about. She is so untidy, and often hardly clean. Her face is sometimes smeared with fruit, and I've seen her hands black and scratched. "Gloves, gloves," I said to her one day. But of course she didn't heed. Then she told me one day she'd lost her comb—hadn't had a comb for a fortnight! I felt quite ill. Hair sometimes makes a woman, you know.'

'You reflect a good deal on me, Mrs. Minimy,' said Lady Mary laughing. 'But those are details I never could look into. *My* comb doesn't get lost! Why should Cecily's? However, at Christmas I leave Beaulieu, anyhow, whether my son is married or not. That I've said firmly, and I mean to stick to it. I've literally abandoned myself to my son for two years, and I've come to the end of my patience. The whole thing bores me. I hate widowers! Men should marry again. If a man is deprived of his wife early, he ought to take it as a sign from Heaven that he is born to have two wives. I don't think it's religious to be a widower—I don't, indeed.'

'No, perhaps not,' assented Mrs. Minimy hesitatingly.

'And I do hope your daughter won't fight shy of it,' continued Lady Mary. 'You must excuse my speaking plainly, Mrs. Minimy. The whole world is talking of it, so why not you and I? She'll get a great deal—this place here, and a London house half the year, and my diamonds, and a good domestic creature into the bargain. And I'll present her next year. I can't say fairer. But I'm always afraid of girls. They have such foolish ideas about first love. As if it mattered whether it were first, second, or third, so long as it is the love that gives! My son is the

most generous man. I'm sure he'll make thoroughly good settlements. Mrs. Minimy, *don't* let your daughter be foolish.'

'You are truly kind,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'But I never coerce Blanche. She must do what she likes.'

'There they come!' cried Lady Mary, putting up her eye-glasses. 'And surely—my dear Mrs. Minimy, I believe something has happened! That little Velvetine girl is with them, and she looks as sour as vinegar. If she wasn't such a little ape, I'd tell her how well spoken of Lucius Cleve is. But she doesn't deserve him, and I hope the match will be broken off. Ah, she's just joined Mr. Jermine! My good Velvetine, if you're looking ahead in that quarter, I think you'll only find breakers!'

Then Blanche and St. Roque came up, and St. Roque proclaimed his great joy, and formally asked Blanche's hand of Mrs. Minimy. Lady Mary kissed Blanche ecstatically, and before every one.

'My dear girl, I'm eternally obliged to you!' she cried. 'You're the sweetest creature in the world, and you shall have my diamonds.'

'O Lady Mary, I don't want them,' said Blanche.

'But you shall have them, my dear, and I'll present you,' Lady Mary rattled on. 'I'm getting old, and diamonds are ticklish things for old ladies. You'll become them *à merveille*, and I'll give them to you. They're not heirlooms, and Cecily's too dark. You don't mind being a stepmother, do you?' she added in a whisper. 'You can send Cecily to school, you know. I'll back you up. Only not in London! Mind, not in London on any account. I will *not* have her near me. What have you done with the Velvetine? I saw her coming along green with jealousy.'

'She stopped to speak to Mr. Jermine,' said Blanche.

'Oh, she thinks she's going to Ule, does she?' said Lady Mary. 'The little fool! Just you snub her, my dear. Let her see that Mrs. St. Roque of Beaulieu is somebody. By the bye, do you like my son?'

'*Like* him!' murmured Blanche. 'O, Lady Mary, I never imagined I could care for any one so much!'

'Don't let me detain you, if you were just going, Mr. Jermine,' said Flora, taking a seat.

'I was not going immediately,' he returned. 'May I sit down?'

Flora's injured soul rebounded. The craving of her vanity was appeased.

'I was making a third,' she said, with a grave smile. 'That is why I stopped. Mr. St. Roque and Blanche Minimy are just engaged.'

'Indeed,' observed Jermine. 'I believe the event has been anticipated.'

'Yes. If they were sensible one would feel interested. But they are positively in love with each other.'

'I suppose they are happy,' said Jermine.

'They are foolishly happy,' returned Flora. 'Is not their happiness based upon the perishable?'

'You are right, Miss Velvetine.'

'I am sure that I am right,' said she. 'I offended poor Mr. Cleve just now by saying something of the kind to him. He was quite angry. He is one of those people to whom happiness is impossible. I told him he could never make himself or any one else happy. You know he and I had a sort of engagement when we were girl and boy.'

'I thought you were engaged now,' said Jermine.

'Oh, no! Not for a long time. His warmth upset me, and I gave it up. I wish, above all things, to possess equanimity. I begged him to-day not to talk to me unless he could be calm. Was I right?'

'No doubt. It is a great mistake to foster perturbed feelings.'

'So I thought, and to-day I sent him away for good and all. I told him I could never live with a person who continually disturbed my serenity.'

'You were wise,' said Jermine. 'And you will have your reward. You will have a happy middle life and a blessed old age.'

'And what *now*?' asked Flora, archly.

'*Now* you have perfect content,' said he.

'Ah, how do you do, Jérmine?' said Wheble, coming up with his elder niece. 'I have just come from Ule. Margaret is better.'

'I am so sorry your little girl is ill, Mr. Jermine,' said Miss Ovid.

'She is under your uncle's charge, and I am quite happy about her,' returned Jermine. 'Wheble, when will you come and dine with me?'

'I don't know that I will come at all,' growled Wheble. 'I don't know that I could sit at meat with you, Jermine. But yes. Some day I will come, and I warn you I shall talk about my little patient. Miss Velvetine, I hope you didn't think me rude for forbidding you to go to Margaret.'

'I don't suppose I should have gone anyhow,' said Flora. 'Margaret has her nurse. What else can she want? I suppose, Mr. Jermine, you know Blanche Minimy has been to see her?'

'Miss Minimy went at my request,' said Wheble. 'The child is under my care, and I never allow my mode of treatment to be interfered with—not even by a parent, Jermine.'

'I have no wish,' said the father. 'My sole desire is that Margaret should be restored to health as soon as possible. Ill-health greatly interferes with the tranquillity of mind essential to happiness. Miss Velvetine and I were just discussing the advantageousness of cultivating mental tranquillity. I hear that St. Roque is just engaged to Miss Minimy.'

'Indeed!' ejaculated Miss Ovid. 'That accounts for what I saw not many minutes ago—Lady Mary St. Roque was kissing Miss Minimy heartily on both cheeks. What a sweet girl Miss Minimy is! I hope she will be happy.'

'That is not very likely,' said Flora.

'Why not?' asked Miss Ovid.

'Why not?' echoed Wheble, sharply.

'How can people be happy who excite themselves so much?' said Flora.

'Marriage does not conduce to happiness,' remarked Jermine. 'I am sure of that.'

'Jermine, you used to be considered a clever man,' said Wheble. 'Now answer me this. You decry marriage; how is the human race to be carried on without it?'

'I don't decry marriage,' replied Jermine, mildly. 'I only decry what are called love marriages.'

'Tch! You are an imbecile,' cried Wheble. 'Marriage without love is a profanation.'

'Marriage *with* love is a folly,' said Jermine, quietly. 'Besides, there is too much marrying. If five out of every six marriages were arrested, there would be considerably less unhappiness in the world.'

'Really, Mr. Jermine, you surprise me,' said Miss Ovid. 'Are you in jest? or are you cynical?'

'He is neither, my dear,' said Wheble. 'He is *stupid*.'

'Your uncle is polite to me, is he not?' said Jermine, smiling. 'I never take offence. But I hold my opinion. I sincerely hope that my daughter will never marry. I look to Miss Velvetine to help me in influencing her.'

'If the ladies weren't here I should say you were a fool, and as it is, I *will* say you are a blockhead!' exclaimed Wheble. 'Why, a marriage for love is the most sacred event in a man's life, and you ought to be ashamed to think otherwise! As to marriage without love—my good fellow, it spoiled the holiness of Judaism, it has made Mahometanism barbarous, it has crushed the manhood and the strength out of every nation and every religion that has permitted it. In a good world, in a pure and vigorous world, in a noble and beautiful world, woman must reign; and she cannot reign where marriages without love are common. Shame on you to name such a thing in connexion with your daughter!'

'I did not,' said Jermine. 'I said I did not wish my daughter to marry at all.'

'You disgust me!' cried Wheble, jumping up. 'Aurelia, we had better go. Where is Isabee?'

It was some time before they found her. Early in the afternoon she had wandered into the woods by herself, and there, at a later hour, she had met Cleve. When she saw him he was coming along at a rapid pace, viciously switching nettles and grass with his stick. She was half-frightened and would have stood aside to let him pass. But he perceived her and stopped.

'I have done it,' he said abruptly.

'How do you do, Mr. Cleve?' returned she, timidly.

'Oh, I beg your pardon! How do you do?' he said. 'Let me walk with you a little. I must talk to some one. I have done it.'

He spoke wildly. She stared at him aghast.

'O Mr. Cleve!' she ejaculated.

'Do you know what I have done?' he asked.

'N—no.'

'Can you guess?'

'Y—yes. Perhaps.'

'I have broken off my engagement, Miss Ovid.'

'O Mr. Cleve, I am so sorry.'

'You needn't be sorry.' She didn't care for me—not one bit. I believe now she never cared for me. I gave her up because I felt that. It stung me so! But it's hard—awfully hard—when I loved her so! I was working so hard for her, and we could have been married in two years, and she'd only have been one-and-twenty!'

He groaned aloud.

'O Mr. Cleve, don't! I am so sorry,' said Isabee.

'I don't care a rush,' he said fiercely, and suddenly changing his mood. 'She is heartless and inconstant, and worldly. She is incapable of love. All women are.'

'Oh, please, Mr. Cleve, don't! You frighten me,' said Isabee.

He paused, and looked at her. Then he burst into a strange peal of laughter.

'Do I frighten you?' he said. 'Never mind. You can afford to suffer a little now, for I'll be bound you'll make others suffer by and by. Those pretty eyes of yours will draw some fool to you, and you'll smile and beckon and make a worse fool of him, and then you'll tell him you don't care for him, and he may go! That's what she did. Not so coarsely. But that's what she meant. You'll have it all your own way in a year or two, and you'll find it's a fine operation to squeeze a man's heart. Women like to use their power—eh?'

'I think you are unkind to speak to me like this,' said Isabee. 'What harm have I ever done you?'

Her lip began to tremble.

'I didn't mean to frighten you,' he said, more gently. 'No. You have never done me any harm. You have always been kind to me. But you are a little girl still. It is *women* who kill us, and smile.'

'Oh, don't say such things,' said Isabee. 'How did this sad, sad thing happen?'

'I can hardly tell you,' he replied. 'She reproached me, and I got angry, and in a moment it was over. I am proud, you know. I bore a great deal because I loved her so—O God, I loved her so!—but at last I could bear it no longer, and I gave her back the locket she gave me. Now she is free—quite free. I couldn't marry a girl against her will!'

'But won't you make it up again, Mr. Cleve?'

'No. Never again.'

'O Mr. Cleve!'

'Do you think I *could*? No, no. I am too proud. Never, never again!'

'But you will be so unhappy!'

He laughed bitterly.

'I dare say that is part of the programme,' he said. '*She* won't care. What woman would? But I suppose I shall go on somehow. I feel better since I talked to you. You are a dear little girl, and you have been kind to me. What is your name? I should like to remember you by name.'

'Isabel Elizabeth Ovid. They call me Isabee.'

'That is pretty. Don't tell people what I've said to you. But if you hear people abuse me, say something kind about me.'

'Yes, Mr. Cleve. What shall I say?'

'Well, say you once took a walk with me, and that you didn't find me a brute.'

'Yes.'

'Don't say I frightened you out of your wits first,' he added, with a flickering smile.

'Oh, no! I shall say you were nice to me.'

He smiled again.

'Thank you,' he said. 'I wish you were never going to be a woman. I wish you were always going to be a dear little girl.'

'O Mr. Cleve, I wish you weren't so unhappy.'

'It's no good wishing, Isabee. I am miserable. But I suppose I shall get over it. Fame must be my mistress now. I shall go back to town to-morrow, and perhaps we shall never meet again. But, in years to come, when you see my name in the papers, don't forget that a man's heart is awfully tender. Be merciful to the fellows who gather round you. If you must play with their hearts, do it gently.'

'I shall never do that,' said she.

'Shall you not? Then you will be a miracle. It seems to me that pretty women cannot be sweet and good.'

'Oh, they can, they can!' cried Isabee.

The tears sprang to her eyes.

'Oh, Mr. Cleve, do, do think differently!' she entreated. 'Please, please don't say such things! I am only a girl. But I know it isn't fair. Pretty women *are* good—they are indeed. Please, please think differently.'

‘You dear little girl!’ cried he, impulsively. ‘You are my good angel, Isabee.’

‘But will you think differently?’ she urged.

‘To please you, I will,’ he said.

Then they turned a corner and saw Dr. Wheble and Miss Ovid coming towards them.

‘God bless you, dear!’ said the young man. ‘You don’t know what you have done for me.’

CHAPTER VIII.

MARGARET'S illness was neither long nor severe. A few days of fever, and a few nights of restlessness and wandering, gave place to a brief period of weakness, which was quickly followed by the delicious sense of returning vigour. Little Margaret had never been so happy in her life. Her nurse was kind. Dr. Wheble's solicitude was tender. Velvetine and Mitchell were excluded from the sick-room. But the little invalid was frequently visited by Blanche, and several times by Mrs. Minimy. Henry, too, was constantly with her. He had refused to leave home.

'I got her into the scrape, and I'll stick to her,' he had said.

So he was much with her, and relieved the tedium of her convalescence after his own fashion.

At last the day of parting came. The two children were together in the schoolroom. Henry was to go to Eton on the morrow. It was a month since the adventure on the mere, and Margaret had nearly regained her usual health. The only remaining effect of her illness was that she soon became tired. She was tired now, and had thrown herself down upon the couch.

'It's eight o'clock,' observed Henry. 'I shall have to go directly.'

'Oh, Henry dear, don't go yet!' begged Margaret.

'Well, I needn't go for a minute or two. It's rather a big good-bye to-night, Peggy.'

'Yes. I can't bear it. When shall you come back?'

'Some day in December.'

'And you'll come and see me directly.'

'Won't I just!'

'Oh, Henry dear, what *shall* I do without you?'

'Oh, you'll do all right ! 'Tisn't long till December.'

'But Velvetine'll come back, and the Minimy-my's going to be married.'

'Well, that won't hurt.'

'Yes, it will. She won't come and see me any more. She's going to Paris with Mr. St. Roque.'

'But you see, Peggy, you'll be quite well soon, and then you'll be doing your lessons again. Old Pin's awfully sorry about your being ill.'

'I don't mind old Pin, Henry. It's Velvetine.'

'Well, you must swallow Velvetine, old girl.'

'I wish I could,' said Margaret, making a grimace.

'I say, Peggy, you know she's jilted Mr. Cleve.'

'My word !' ejaculated the little girl.

'She has. I heard Mrs. Minimy say so.'

'What a lark, Henry ! But what is it ?'

'What's what ?'

'What's jilting ?'

'Oh, I don't know. He kicked up a row, and she gave him one for himself. And then he skedaddled. He's gone off to London, and they are not going to be married. That's it.'

'What an infernal nuisance !' exclaimed Margaret. 'She'll be my blessed governess till doomsday.'

'Now, Peggy, it's not fair of you to take advantage of being ill to talk like that. I tell you I will *not* be talked to as if I were a groom.'

'Oh, I beg your pardon, Henry dear. I'm so sorry. You see, I quite forget sometimes. I don't want to be mean and take advantage. But I *wish* I was always ill !'

'What for, Peggy ?'

'Dr. Wheble's so jolly, and so is nurse. It's a precious bother getting well, because of Velvetine and Mitchell. I say, Henry, does Velvetine mind about Mr. Cleve ?'

'I shouldn't think so. Lady Mary St. Roque says she's a vulgar little toad. Besides, she did it herself.'

'Did it ?'

'Jilted him, I mean.'

'Oh, gave him one for himself. Yes. Then you don't think she'll be in a wax ?'

'I can't say.'

'Have you seen her lately, Henry ?'

'Not I!'

'I rather wish you had.'

'Why, old girl?'

'Oh, I don't know. Have you ever seen a person who's jilted?'

'No.'

'May I come in?' said a voice at the door.

It was Wheble who entered. He had been dining with Margaret's father. Both the children received him joyfully.

'And how is my little girl to-night?' he inquired, sitting down, and taking Margaret on his knee.

She clasped one arm about his neck, and slid her other hand into his. It seemed to Margaret as if she had known this kind gentleman all her life.

'Quite well, thank you,' she replied.

'That's right,' said Wheble. 'Mr. Pinington has been asking after you. He wants to know when he is to have his little pupil again.'

'He may come back whenever he likes,' said Margaret, with a sigh.

'Why do you sigh?' asked Wheble. 'Don't you like your lessons?'

'I don't mind Mr. Pinington,' said Margaret.

'She doesn't like getting well because of Velvetine,' volunteered Henry.

'Velvetine's never going to be married,' cried Margaret. 'Isn't it dreadful?'

'Well, I'm not sure,' returned Wheble, smiling. 'Some people say Mr. Cleve has had an escape.'

'She's a beast,' said Margaret, with decision.

'Now, my dear little girl, I won't have that,' said Wheble, seriously. 'Shall I tell you something, Margaret? If you talk to me as if I were a groom, I sha'n't talk to you at all. I can't talk to a young lady as if *she* were a groom, so I shall avoid you altogether.'

'O Dr. Wheble, please, please don't!'

'I don't *want* to avoid you, dear child. But you *must* learn to talk nicely. Why don't you talk like your dear Miss Minimy?'

'I'll try,' said the child.

'Oh, she'll try,' cried Henry, cheerfully. 'You'll be a

regular dab at talking nicely by the time I see you again, Peggy, won't you?'

'I'll try,' repeated Margaret. 'But the Minimy-my's going to London to get her wedding dress, and then she's going to be married, and then Mr. St. Roque's going to take her to Paris. I do wish Mr. St. Roque would take Velvetine to Paris instead!'

Then the nurse came in and said she thought that Miss Margaret ought to go to bed, and Wheble kissed the little girl and went down stairs. Henry lingered a few moments.

'It's come to good-bye, old girl,' he said.

'I know,' she returned, dismally. 'Oh, Henry dear, I wish you weren't going!'

'Nonsense, Peggy. I've got to go and learn all the things gentlemen know, and you've got to learn to talk like a lady. Will you practise talking nicely? The Minimy-my says it's quite sad to hear you.'

Margaret could not speak. She was crying. He put his arm around her.

'Don't cry,' he said. 'Just say you'll be good, and learn to talk nicely!'

'I will, I will,' she sobbed.

'That's all serene, Peggy. And don't cheek Mitchell. It's not like a gentleman to cheek servants.'

'Oh, I won't, Henry dear!'

'And stick to Dr. Wheble.'

'Yes—yes.'

'And Mrs. Minimy'll tell you about me.'

'Yes.'

'And just don't mind Velvetine.'

'I'll try. But it's an awful plague if she's never going to be married, Henry. I wish she hadn't jilted Mr. Cleve!'

'So do I. But it can't be helped, and you must keep a civil tongue in your head, Peggy. You'll be quite a lady when I come back, won't you, old girl?'

'Oh, I'll try, Henry dear! I'll try as hard as ever I can.'

'That's right, old girl. Now good-bye. Don't cry. I shall be back in no time.'

Then he kissed her and went. And Margaret shed many tears, and all the efforts of the kind nurse to console her were of no avail.

Wheble returned to Jermine with a thoughtful face.

'How is Margaret?' inquired the father.

'I am obliged to confess that she is all but convalescent,' replied the doctor.

'You are obliged to confess?' repeated the other.

'Yes. I wish I could conscientiously say that the present *régime* must continue to exist. Unfortunately, duty compels me to declare that, in a week from to-day, you may dismiss the nurse, and order that Margaret's studies shall be resumed.'

'Wheble, I owe you a thousand thanks,' said Jermine, earnestly. 'You have saved my child's life.'

'Nonsense! I've done nothing of the sort. The child is a remarkably healthy subject, and with much less care than I have bestowed upon her, she would have done just as well. Besides, why thank me for saving the life of a person whose society is nothing to you? You never went to see her once.'

'No. It was against my principles to go. Unhappily, I have reason to believe that my daughter is affectionate by nature, and I do not desire that her affections should be fastened on me.'

'Then why the devil do you thank me for having pulled her through? Hadn't she better die than live to have her affections starved?'

'I hope she will live and be *happy*, Wheble. If I starve her affections, I shall nourish her intellect and her taste. Did you say that she might resume her lessons in a week?'

'I did.'

'Then I will write to Miss Velvetine and see Pinington.'

'See Pinington, by all means, Jermine. But I have a great favour to beg of you, and that is, that you will give Miss Velvetine her *congé*. From what I have seen of her, I consider her totally unfit to be the instructress of a child.'

'From what I know of her, Wheble, I consider her peculiarly fitted to be the instructress of *my* child.'

'On what grounds? You surely don't like her?'

'No. I do not like her. On the contrary, as far as I allow myself to have any active feeling towards any one, I dislike her. She is repelling, repellent, heartless, calculating. For these very reasons I consider that she is an appropriate

person to carry out my theory of education. She will never love Margaret, or make Margaret love her.'

Wheble shook the ashes from his cigar impatiently.

'My dear fellow, are you going to live and die in the indulgence of these crazy ideas?' he said. 'I forgave you at first, when you were in deep grief. But I never imagined that your ridiculous idea would become fixed. I thought that when the poignancy of your grief abated, your brain would assume its normal state and that you would laugh at yourself for your vagaries. It surprises me that you still retain this mania. I didn't think you were such a fool!' concluded the doctor, energetically.

'We will let that pass,' said Jermine. 'I need not recapitulate my theory. You know that I, having suffered terribly, believe that love is sorrow. Consequently, I have expelled love from my own breast. I love no one, and I am happy. In intellectual pursuits I find a happiness, regulated by the calmest and purest wisdom, and which nothing but absolute senility can take from me. Does it surprise you that I am endeavouring to place the same happiness within my daughter's grasp?'

'Yes, it does,' replied Wheble. 'It surprises me very much. If you don't love your daughter, why trouble about her education?'

'It is my duty to trouble about her education, Wheble.'

'Your duty! Pooh! It is your duty to make the poor child happy, and you are making her miserable.'

'My dear Wheble, do be reasonable. Whether I love my child or not is of small consequence. At all events, I do not indulge my affection for her. And I refrain from loving her mainly for her sake. In the course of nature I shall die first, and I would not inflict upon her the pain of losing a loved father.'

'Then why not let her make friends of her own age? Why announce that you don't wish her to marry?'

'Wish her to marry!' exclaimed Jermine, with unusual animation, 'I would sooner she died than married! You don't know what marriage is, Wheble. But I tell you it is this: it is as if a Christian, a saint, a martyr, were to enter in at the gates of heaven, and when he knelt at the feet of his Lord, found himself snatched away to the nethermost hell.'

Wheble sighed deeply. But he did not reply.

'Besides,' added Jermine, resuming his wonted calm, 'youth is a very brief portion of the usual span of life. You say that I am making my child miserable. Maybe. But if so, I am making her miserable for a few years in order that the major part of her life may be rendered happy. By nipping her affections in the bud, I trust that she will become self-contained and self-satisfying. Thus only can she attain real happiness.'

'Good God!' ejaculated Wheble.

Then he smoked for some time in silence.

'Miss Velvetine has broken off her engagement,' he remarked at last.

'I know,' rejoined Jermine.

'Do you know what for?' asked Wheble.

'She told me that Cleve's ardour upset her equanimity,' said Jermine.

'Tch! The girl's no idiot. She wants to be the mistress of Ule.'

'So I rather imagined,' said Jermine, with a faint smile.

'Oh, you imagined that, did you?' said Wheble.

'There's some hope for you, Jermine. You haven't quite forgotten the ways of the world. Miss Velvetine calculates on captivating you by her cold demeanour. She—the creature you have selected to bring up your daughter—is the most perfect specimen of an absolutely hard-hearted human being that I have ever seen. I congratulate you on your taste!'

'I am not going to make her an offer of marriage,' said Jermine.

'But you are going to let her bring up your child?'

'Certainly.'

'But you own you dislike her?'

'Yes. Nevertheless she suits my purpose.'

'My dear fellow, if she were only cold and passionless, I could forgive you. But she is not passionless. She has passions, and they are low passions. She is designing, manœuvring, vulgar-minded.'

'I cannot help that. She effects my principal object, which is that Margaret's affections shall not be excited.'

'And are you not afraid that she will make Margaret as vulgar-minded as herself?'

'Not in the least. Character is inherent. The high-

mind by nature will be high-minded under all circumstances. I am not afraid that my child's integral virtues will be chased away by outside influences. What I want to affect is her disposition. I want to dispose her—while she is young and impressionable—to be calm and self-sufficing. I want to accustom her to seek happiness in undying pleasures.'

'But you can't do it,' said Wheble. 'You can dwarf a disposition. But you can't altogether alter it. You can make an oak grow all on one side. But you can't make it creep along the ground like the ivy. Beware Jermine! You are ruining a fine disposition. Margaret is naturally high-spirited and affectionate. Repress her nature at your peril. The passions that you starve will not become extinct, and should they be called into sudden life by any circumstance beyond your control, they will play the very devil with her. You are pursuing a very perilous path. Be warned in time!'

Jermine made no answer, and the two men smoked on, without a word. Wheble was restless. Jermine, sitting with interlaced fingers clasped upon his knee, was motionless. At last he broke the silence.

'Do you think I am mad, Wheble?' he asked.

'Yes, I do,' replied the doctor, without hesitation.

'Then why don't you take steps to deliver my daughter into proper custody? Why don't you take steps to prove that I am *non compos*?'

'There would be difficulties,' said Wheble, reluctantly. 'I couldn't prove it. No one could. By the law of the land you would be considered sane.'

'My dear fellow, I *am* sane,' said Jermine, smiling. 'Don't you see that I am laughing at you?'

'I see that you're a fool,' said the doctor, gruffly. 'However, I've warned you. I'd frustrate you if I could. I'm sorry I can't. But recollect what I say. If you defy nature, you only produce disease and deformity. If Margaret takes to your preposterous ideas of happiness, she will become narrow-minded and selfish. If she doesn't, her pent-up affections will burst forth some day like a torrent, and neither you nor any one else will be able to check them. Every power must be developed gradually. Let me illustrate. Suppose you bandaged an infant's eyes and kept them tied up till he was grown up. What do you imagine would happen when you removed the bandages? Would he know

what was what? Wouldn't he fall about, and perhaps do himself an injury? Similarly, if you had bound up his legs. Wouldn't he tumble down when he tried to walk?'

'But, my dear Wheble, you are illogical,' said Jermine. 'You cite physiological instances. The case in point is psychological. Nothing can make up to a blind man for the loss of sight, of course. But a great deal can make up for the lack of love. I intend Margaret to be thoroughly well educated. She will have an immense number of ennobling and perfectly harmless pleasures. I forbid only that she should indulge the affections, because, by experience, I know this indulgence to be baneful.'

'Poor little dear!' said Wheble, pityingly. 'Do you know what your system has reduced her to?'

'To nothing as yet.'

'I beg your pardon. Do you know what she talked about when she was light-headed?'

'No.'

'First of all, she was always imploring Henry Bartropps to love her. Then she kept entreating Miss Minimy to take Miss Velvetine away. Then she called repeatedly on Bensley, and talked a great deal of slang, which she has picked up in the stables, because the grooms are the only members of your establishment who show her any affection. In the absence of proper people to care for, she loves a groom, a boy companion, and a young lady whom you scarcely know. She never mentioned you, Jermine, and only named her governess and her maid in terms of aversion.'

'I am sorry my daughter has been so much in the stable,' said Jermine, slightly contracting his eyebrows. 'I will discharge Bensley.'

'Good heavens, Jermine, what a brute you are!' exclaimed Wheble. 'What! discharge the only servant the child cares for!—when her playfellow is going off to school, and her only friend is going to be married!'

'The very reason, Wheble. I *wish* that my daughter should love no one.'

'You pig-headed dolt!' growled Wheble. 'I wish I hadn't told you!'

'I am much obliged to you for having done so,' said Jermine.

Wheble emitted an angry sound from between his teeth.

But he said nothing further. He was too much displeased for words.

‘Wheble, my dear fellow, I believe you think all manner of hard things about me,’ said Jermine. ‘But I assure you I am not hard-hearted, nor do I lay heavy burdens on my daughter out of tyranny. One of your own body, Sir Thomas Browne, said, “To enjoy true Happinesse, we must travel into a very far Countree, and even out of ourselves.” Now, to procure happiness for her, I would cause my daughter to travel out of herself. And as man is love, she must leave love behind, if she would leave herself behind.’

‘At the expense of herself,’ put in Wheble. ‘Of what good is happiness to her, if she is no longer herself?’

Jermine smiled.

‘By habit,’ he said, ‘this travel into a very far country—this quitting of her primal self—will become her second self, and by the annihilation of the first, the second will become her *very* self. Her first self is love, which is the prey of the most terrible passions, and which can be repeatedly injured in the cruellest way. Her second self is an all-sufficing calm, against which no blow but senility can be struck. I am sure I am right in endeavouring to expel the one from my child’s breast, and to cherish the other.’

‘I see what you mean,’ said Wheble, getting up, ‘and I still think you are a confounded ass. Good-night.’

‘Good-night, my dear Wheble,’ returned Jermine, with composure.

CHAPTER IX.

By Jermine's order, the sick-nurse departed one evening after Margaret had gone to bed, without making any adieux to the child. It was Mitchell, therefore, who came into Margaret's room on the following morning.

'Mitchell!' ejaculated the little girl. 'Where's nurse?'

Mitchell tossed her head. Her sense of importance had been deeply wounded by her exclusion from the sick-room.

'Nurse has gone, Miss Margaret,' she said stiffly.

'Gone!' exclaimed the child.

'Nurse has gone, Miss Margaret,' repeated Mitchell, in a louder key. 'You won't never see *her* no more.'

'I wish she'd said good-bye to me,' said Margaret, with regret.

'I dare say!' remarked Mitchell. 'People have other fish to fry than saying good-bye to naughty girls, I do expect. After all the trouble you'd been to her, it was a merciful providence when she could take and be off.'

'Did nurse say I'd been naughty?' asked Margaret, with the tears in her eyes.

'Well, Miss Margaret, and what ever else could she say?' replied Mitchell.

It seemed to Margaret as if the vague answer were assertive, and she got up feeling very wretched. Nurse, then, had not really loved her. She was like the courtiers of whom Margaret had read in history. While her lips smiled, her black heart had been full of treachery. After breakfast, Margaret eluded Mitchell, and slipped away to the stables.

'Bensley, Bensley!' she called, as she came running along.

But no familiar voice replied.

'Bensley ain't here, miss,' said a strange man, coming out of the harness-room.

'Not here!' echoed Margaret. 'Where is he then?'

'He's gone, miss,' said the man. 'He cleared out on Saturday.'

'Oh dear, I'm so sorry,' cried Margaret. 'But where are the others? Where are Joseph and Thomas?'

Joseph and Thomas had gone too. Margaret asked why. But the new groom was not accessible. He was a grim and taciturn personage. Moreover, he had been warned that any advances on his part towards the young lady of the house might lead to dismissal. So Margaret went away disconsolate, and ran breathlessly through the woods to Bartropps. But here a fresh disappointment awaited her. Mrs. and Miss Minimy had gone to London. The poor child went back to her piano. Jermine, questioning Mitchell in the evening as to how Miss Margaret had spent the day, and learning that, after fruitless visits to the stable and to Bartropps, she had sat at her instrument for hours, felt completely justified in pursuing his scheme.

'She is already learning to rely upon an intellectual pleasure,' he said to himself.

The next day lessons recommenced. Miss Velvetine arrived punctually, and set to work as if nothing had occurred. She did not even ask Margaret how she was.

'Why do you stare at me so?' she said, ruling a copy-book.

'I don't know,' replied Margaret, who was looking with curiosity at the person who had given Mr. Cleve one for himself, and jilted him.

'I hope you are going to do better now,' Miss Velvetine presently vouchsafed to say. 'I hope you are going to leave off being such a great tom-boy.'

Whereat Margaret flushed scarlet. There is an instinctive womanhood in the most hoydenish girl which makes her shrink from being called a great tom-boy. Margaret, who was not even a hoyden, was painfully hurt by this appellation. Her pride was stung.

'I'm not a tom-boy,' she began, in a loud and excited voice. 'I'm——'

Then she stopped short.

'Well?' said Miss Velvetine.

But Margaret would not speak. She had remembered Henry's injunction.

'I see you are not the least bit improved,' said Flora. 'I foresee some hard battles before us.'

Whereupon, Margaret's face assumed a sullen expressoin, and retained it until the entrance of Mr. Pinington.

During the autumn months, the desolateness of the child would have been complete but for the daily kindness of Pinington. Wheble she seldom saw, and Bartropps was shut up. Henry was at Eton, and Miss Minimy had gone to town to buy her wedding clothes and to be married at St. George's, Hanover Square. Margaret grew tall and thin. Mitchell called her a weed. She was dull and silent, and Velvetine sometimes called her crosspatch. Music and roaming in the woods by herself were her only pleasures. Riding had lost its chief charm for her since the departure of Bensley. The new groom followed her respectfully. But she could never draw him into conversation.

One day, when she was sauntering through the woods, she met a lady, who looked pityingly at the melancholy child and began to talk to her.

'You are Margaret Jermine, are you not?' she said. 'I am Dr. Wheble's niece, and my uncle has often told me about you.'

Then the lady and the little girl walked on together, talking, and Margaret thought that her companion was the most beautiful person she had ever seen, except the Minimy-my. Then they came to a gate, at which the child paused.

'I mustn't go any further,' she said. 'That is Beaulieu. I mustn't go into Beaulieu.'

'Doesn't your father allow you to go out of the grounds?' asked Miss Ovid.

'I don't know,' said Margaret. 'They've always told me not to go to Beaulieu. So I don't.'

'I think you are a very honourable little girl,' said Miss Ovid.

'Henry says it isn't like a gentleman to break your word,' returned Margaret, simply. 'He says it's only cad's and sneaks who take mean advantage.'

Margaret, indeed, adhered strictly to the code of honour formulated by Henry. She would openly disobey Velvetine,

and wilfully evade the authority of Mitchell. But she would have died sooner than commit the meanness which Henry called taking advantage. Nothing could have induced her to deceive or over-reach Pinington. Nothing could have made her infringe the unwritten laws, whose origin she knew not, but which she had had imposed upon her in her infancy, and which, she conceived, must have emanated from her father.

The poor little girl strove hard not to do anything caddish, —so to arrange her ways and words that Henry should approve when he returned home. But when Henry returned she had gone away.

‘Your father wishes you to have a dozen good music-lessons, and he has asked me to take you to London for six weeks,’ Miss Velvetine informed her one day.

Margaret had never slept away from Ule for a single night, and she was struck dumb with astonishment at this news.

‘But—but I sha’n’t see Henry,’ she stammered at last.

‘That can’t be helped,’ said Miss Velvetine. ‘This is the time which is convenient to all parties. My mother is going too.’

Margaret expostulated no further. But she shed many bitter tears in secret. What was London to her? She had no wish to go thither. There was nothing to be gained by going. At eight years old one does not appreciate the advantage of having music-lessons from a great artist. But she said nothing. To whom, indeed, should she appeal? She was full of despondency. Flora, on the contrary, was much elated.

‘I confide Margaret entirely to your charge,’ Jermine had said to her. ‘Let her see and do all that will cultivate her mind.’

Then he had begged her to accept a Christmas present from himself, and he had tendered to her a handsome purse, containing twenty pounds. Flora had come away from the interview very happy. For weeks she had been discontented and irritable. Jermine had made no immediate advances, and it had come to her ears that Lucius Cleve was considered to be a rising man, and that people in authority had their eyes upon him. It had occurred to her more than once that perhaps she had done foolishly in

breaking off her engagement with the latter. But her spirits revived when Jermine laid before her his plan for preventing a renewal of the intimacy between Margaret and Henry, and begged her to assist him in carrying it out. There was no doubt in her mind that he affected her. Naturally he was slow in his proceedings. From the very nature of the case, it was unlikely that he should be impulsive or hasty. Flora, therefore, was made glad, and she set forth to London with a light heart.

It was a cold and foggy day, and as the train sped towards the metropolis, dreary and sunless landscapes were disclosed to view. Margaret sat in her corner of the railway carriage, dismal and quiet. She was overawed by the rapid motion of the train, by the noise at the large stations where they stopped, by the element of the unusual which surrounded her. But no one asked if she were frightened. No one remembered that this was the first journey she had ever made.

'Isn't she a stupid child?' whispered Flora to her mother.

Flora, travelling for the first time in a first-class carriage, with a handsome Christmas-box in her pocket, and with a large house, a carriage, and servants awaiting her in London, might well be gay and smiling. But none of these delights appealed to Margaret. She knew no distinction of classes. No one had given her so much as sixpence to spend. And as to the establishment of which Flora was to be the proud mistress for six weeks, it differed little from Ule, as far as Margaret was concerned. It was scarcely surprising that the little girl evinced no lively satisfaction as she journeyed to town.

When she reached London, it seemed to her to be a frightful place. She—who was entirely fearless at Ule—was terrified by the noise, the bustle, the seeming confusion of the streets. She thought that there was a riot, and held her breath as they drove through the lamp-lit, murky thoroughfares. She lay awake half that night, listening to the tramp of men's feet and the rumbling of vehicles outside, and expecting that the house would be besieged, and that men with wild and hungry eyes would come round her, clamouring for bread. The next day it seemed to her that the rioting continued. People passed her in crowds, and in every man

she saw an angry Jack Cade. But she told no one of her apprehensions. Once she shrunk close to Flora and laid her hand for a moment on her companion's muff. But Flora did not understand.

'Don't push so, Margaret,' she said. 'You always push on in front. Little girls should fall behind their elders when the pavement is narrow.'

So Margaret endured her terrors, unconsolated. She would have asked Pinington if the riot were a bad one. But she asked nothing of Velvetine, or of Velvetine's grim mother, or of Mitchell. She was not, however, entirely unhappy. As at Ule, she had the solace of music, and her music-master was kind. He was, indeed, greatly struck by her proficiency. He was struck also by her quietness. She was intelligent. But she had a dull aspect. The great musician had children of his own, and his heart was gentle.

'Isn't the little girl happy, Miss Velvetine?' he asked one day.

'Quite,' replied Flora, promptly.

'She looks so dull,' said he.

'She is not a very good child,' said Flora. 'I am sorry to say she is very sulky and perverse.'

'She seems particularly docile,' observed the musician.

'She gives no trouble, and she is extraordinarily forward.'

'I have taken great pains with her,' said Flora.

Whereupon the musician took an intense dislike to Miss Velvetine, and for five minutes he thought seriously that he would write to Margaret's father and say that he considered Miss Jerminé's governess a most undesirable person. But at the end of the five minutes he laughed at himself.

'The child is pretty, and as my wife often tells me, beauty makes fools of us men,' he said to himself. 'I suppose she is naughty. At all events, I have no valid grounds for entering a protest against Miss Velvetine. I suppose her father knows what he's about. It isn't my place to interfere.'

So he forgot all about it, until one day when he saw Margaret alone. Miss Velvetine and her mother were out. Something had delayed their punctual return. Margaret, however, presented herself at the piano with alacrity.

'Well, how are you to-day?' said the gentleman, shaking hands.

'Quite well, thank you,' replied Margaret, with a little smile.

Her smile, and the absence of Miss Velvetine's frigid face, emboldened him to proceed.

'Have you been to any concerts?' he asked.

'What are concerts?' she inquired.

'Don't you know? A concert is a place where people who can sing and play beautifully, sing and play the most beautiful music that has ever been written, and numbers of people who love music go to hear them. Haven't you been to any at St. James's Hall?'

'No,' said Margaret.

'I am surprised,' said he. 'I must talk to Miss Velvetine about that.'

'Is it nice?' asked the little girl.

'Very. You would like it so much.'

'I don't think Velvetine would let me go,' said Margaret, shaking her head.

'Wouldn't she?'

'No.'

'Why do you call her Velvetine, my dear?'

'Cause I don't like her,' said Margaret.

'That's a pity. Why don't you like her?'

'I don't know.'

'Aren't you happy, my child?'

'I don't know.'

'But you must know. Don't you know what it is to feel nice and comfortable?'

'I don't know,' said Margaret again.

Then the musician tried another plan. He was fond of children, and full of sympathy.

'Are you frightened of any one?' he asked.

'No.'

'Is any one unkind to you?'

'No.'

'Then why don't you run and jump and laugh? My little girls are always laughing.'

'I don't know,' said Margaret.

It seemed a hopeless task to try and gain any information from her. Velvetine would have pushed her away and called her naughty. But the musician put his arm around her.

'My dear little girl, I think you are not very happy,' he said. 'If there is anything you want to say to any one, say it to me. I won't tell Miss Velvetine—that I promise.'

Then, to his surprise, Margaret burst into a flood of tears.

'I don't know—I don't know,' she sobbed.

She clung to him, weeping. He kissed her.

'Come, come, don't cry,' he said. 'Miss Velvetine will be here directly. Come, come! I didn't mean to make you cry. Tell me all about it.'

But she could not tell him. She was too young to know that her life was cruelly burdened by injustice and misapprehension and stupidity.

'Come, come,' he reiterated. 'Tell me all about it, and don't cry. *Pray* don't cry, my child!'

Truth to tell, he was getting alarmed. He did not wish that Miss Velvetine should come in and find him in the act of consoling his weeping pupil. He was a very distinguished man, and there were many people who trembled at the thought of exciting his displeasure. But Miss Velvetine, with her thin lips and her acid demeanour, inspired him with dread. He was almost sorry that he had raised this storm, for, after all, he could do nothing. He could not go about acting the knight-errant to pupils in distress.

'Tell me all about it,' he reiterated. 'But don't cry—don't cry!'

At last Margaret told him one of her troubles.

'Is it a riot going on?' she asked.

'A riot? No,' he replied, amused. 'What made you think so?'

'I've read of riots, and it seems like one,' she told him. 'Such a noise, and so many people, and some of them look fierce!'

'No. There's no riot,' said the musician. 'You see you are not accustomed to towns, my child. In great cities like London, many people live, and where there are many people, there often seems to be confusion. But every one knows what he or she is about, and the people are not fierce, only busy. Is that all that troubles you?'

'I should like to have seen Henry,' said the child, mournfully.

'Who is Henry? Your brother?'

'No. Henry Bartropps.'

'Well, you will see him another time. There is no need to cry about that. Come, no more tears! Do you know you are wasting my time? Now listen. I will play something to you while you dry your eyes. Think about nothing but how soon you will be able to play as I do.'

Then he sat down and played ravishingly, and Margaret's heart beat, and the tears ran down her cheeks, and she clasped her hands, and it seemed as if her body were too small, and as if something within her must burst its bonds and escape, and her eyes shone through her tears, and a beautiful smile parted her lips. And the musician thought, 'She is a lovely child, and I believe Miss Velvetine is a dragon. I wish I could meet the father by chance!'

'Go on, go on! I like it,' cried Margaret.

She was in an ecstasy. She sobbed for joy. Then Flora came in.

'Is Margaret not good?' she asked, harshly.

The musician felt quite sheepish.

'I was just playing to her for a moment,' he said in haste. 'Now, Margaret, begin.'

That was the only time that the kind gentleman and Margaret met alone. Flora tried to find out why Margaret had been crying. But the child would not tell, and Flora had to give up asking her about it.

'You are a naughty, obstinate child,' she said, at length. 'Go away!'

During these weeks, Margaret spent hours of the day in practising. The tall, sober-looking house in Harley Street resounded with the strains of music. She was not unhappy when she sat alone in the large drawing-room at the piano. And she was often alone. The Velvetines were frequently out. They had old friends to visit, and purchases to make. Flora had her twenty pounds to spend. Sometimes she went into society. Sometimes she went to places of amusement. She enjoyed herself thoroughly. She had never had money and a carriage at her disposal before.

'Margaret ought to go to some good concerts,' the musician said one day. 'She would appreciate the Saturday Populars.'

'Mr. Jermine does not wish her to go to concerts,'

Flora replied. 'He does not wish her to cultivate music emotionally.'

So Margaret heard no music. But Flora took her to see the Tower, and Westminster Abbey, and St. Paul's, and the Monument, and Guildhall, and the Houses of Parliament, and told her all the historical incidents connected with these places. And she took her to Primrose Hill and told her about Colonel Blood and the crown-jewels, and to Kensington Gardens and told her about William of Orange. And she took her to Hampton Court and told her about Wolsey, and to Windsor Castle and St. George's Chapel and told her about the Knights of the Garter. And she took her to the National Gallery, and to the British Museum, and to the Temple Church. But she forbore to take her to the Zoological Gardens, or to Madame Tussaud's, or to the Polytechnic, or to the Soho Bazaar, or to see a conjuror or a pantomime, or to feed the ducks in Regent's Park, or to gaze at the fine shops in Regent Street and Oxford Street. Margaret saw everything without comment. She was a singularly uninteresting child, Flora told her friends.

'She has plenty of intelligence,' Miss Velvetine owned. 'I know she understands, because I make her write essays on all she sees, and she does it, I must confess, uncommonly well. But she is sulky—terribly sulky—and more perverse than any one can imagine.'

Parliament assembled just before the ladies in Harley Street returned to Gladeshire. Mr. and Mrs. St. Roque came up to London, and Blanche hurried to call upon her friends. When she arrived, Mrs. Velvetine and Flora were out. Miss Margaret, however, was at home, and Blanche came in. It was late in the afternoon. Margaret was sitting in the twilight at the piano.

'Margaret!' said Blanche.

In an instant the music ceased, and Margaret flew into her arms.

'Oh, my Minimy-my, my Minimy-my!' she almost screamed. 'Oh, I'm so glad! Oh, how jolly! Oh, by George! You darling, darling Minimy-my!'

'Why, Pussy, how you run on!' cried Blanche laughing, and kissing her. 'Why, what will you say next, my pretty? Oh, my sweet girl! What, tears! No, no, I can't let you cry. Come, tell me how Miss Velvetine is?'

‘Oh, Velvetine’s all right,’ said the child. ‘Don’t let’s talk of her.’

‘No. We won’t. Let me sit down, dear pet. There now, don’t knock my bonnet off! Is that right, my chick? Are you comfy?’

Margaret gave a sigh of content and laid her head on Blanche’s shoulder.

‘Oh, my Minimy-my! You dear darling Minimy-my!’ she murmured.

Blanche pressed her closer.

‘Well, and how do you like London, my pet?’ she asked.

‘Oh, not much. But I like my music.’

‘That’s nice. And who is your master?’

‘Mr. Hegel. He used to be a German, and he’s the greatest brick you can think of.’

‘Oh, darling, you haven’t forgotten your slang. How is that?’

‘I do try, my Minimy-my. I don’t often. Henry told me not.’

‘That’s right. You see strangers would be shocked. And what else do you like? Have you been to any concerts?’

‘No. It’s rather rummy you should ask that, because Mr. Hegel did. I should like to.’

‘Perhaps Miss Velvetine will take you.’

‘Oh, no, she won’t. We are going home on Saturday.’

‘So I heard. And are you glad, my Pussy?’

‘I don’t care.’

‘I saw Henry yesterday,’ said Blanche.

‘Did you?’

‘Yes. He was quite well, and he sent his love to you.’

‘Did any Eton fellows come to Bartropps in the holidays, my Minimy-my?’

‘Yes. Two boys came for a fortnight.’

‘I wish Henry knew I was trying,’ said Margaret, with a sigh. ‘I never say “By George” or “Crikey” now. Poor Bensley went away, you know.’

‘Yes. So I heard.’

‘I was so sorry. And then I went to Bartropps, and you’d gone to buy your wedding dress.’

‘You funny little darling, how you do run on from thing to thing! Do tell me about London. You haven’t sat at the piano all the time, have you?’

'No. Velvetine took me to see lots of things, and some of them were splendacious. I saw the block, you know, where he was beheaded, and the room where he was shut up, and Whitehall, where King Charles was beheaded. Oh, my Minimy-my, I didn't like that. It seemed such a bloody deed.'

'Darling Margaret, what can you know about bloody deeds?'

'Old Pin told me. And I know about the Black Prince, and I saw his armour at the Tower, and it wouldn't fit Henry, and there was a gentleman, and he said, "We have developed," and there was *such* a dear little black kitten! And I saw an organ at Westminster Abbey, and one at St. Paul's, and I did so want to hear them play, and I saw Lord Nelson in his coffin, and the Duke of Wellington.'

'My darling pet, you didn't see *them*! You only saw their coffins.'

'I know. But I wish I could have heard the organ play. One day Mr. Hegel played. Oh, my Minimy-my, you don't know how lovely it was!'

'I dare say.'

'And he said there wasn't a riot, so I don't mind all the people now. He was very jolly, and he plays like anything. But I wish I'd heard the organ!'

'So you shall some day, my pretty.'

'Did Henry enjoy himself, my Minimy-my?'

'Yes. I think he was very happy. Of course he missed you. He used often to come and see me.'

'Weren't you at Bartrop's?'

'No, my pet. Don't you know I live at Beaulieu now, with Mr. St. Roque?'

'Yes. Henry and I said it was a pity Mr. St. Roque didn't take Velvetine to Paris. You know she's jilted.'

'My dear chick, what do you know about that?'

'Well, Henry told me she gave Mr. Cleve one for himself, and then they jilted. He made a row, you know. Velvetine's never going to be married now. Isn't it a pity?'

And then Mrs. Velvetine and Flora came in. Margaret still clung to Blanche. But Flora ordered her to move.

'Don't pull Mrs. St. Roque about like that,' she said. 'Go and sit on a chair by yourself, Margaret.'

Margaret obeyed, sighing. But she took a seat behind Blanche, and, unseen, stroked the lady's sealskin jacket. The conversation between her elders did not interest her, and she did not listen. Suddenly, however, the sound of her own name caught her ear.

'Couldn't you come to luncheon, and bring Margaret?' Blanche was saying. 'Do, Flora dear! Adrian would be so pleased to see you. And I should so like Margaret to come.'

'I don't think it can be arranged,' said Flora. 'I mean, as far as Margaret is concerned. She has her last music-lesson that morning at half-past twelve.'

'I can put off luncheon till two,' urged Blanche. 'And I could send the carriage for you, if you like.'

'Thank you,' returned Flora, coldly. 'We have our own carriage.'

'Oh, I beg your pardon,' Blanche hastened to say, blushing. 'But do let her come. I want her to come. I thought she would like to go to the service at Westminster Abbey with Cecily and Mademoiselle.'

Then Margaret could contain herself no longer, for she knew that a service implied organ-playing.

'Oh, my Minimy-my!' she burst forth, stepping forward and clasping Blanche's hand. 'Oh, how stunning! Oh, I should like it so!'

'Margaret, how *dare* you?' exclaimed Flora, rising in extreme wrath and pulling the child away. 'How can you venture to call Mrs. St. Roque by that silly name? Make her an apology immediately.'

'But the organ—the organ!' cried Margaret.

'You will not go,' said Flora. 'Didn't you hear what I said? Tell Mrs. St. Roque you are sorry you spoke so disrespectfully.'

'Oh, I like it,' murmured Blanche. 'Don't scold her, Flora.'

'She ought to go to bed,' observed Mrs. Velvetine. 'She should if I had anything to do with her. But I never interfere.'

'You are extremely naughty,' said Flora. 'Tell Mrs. St. Roque you are sorry.'

But Margaret stood silent.

'Tell Mrs. St. Roque you are sorry,' repeated Flora.

Still Margaret remained speechless. All the brightness had gone out of her face. She looked sullen and defiant.

'Oh, never mind, never mind,' said Blanche, in much distress.

'But I *do* mind,' said Flora. 'Mr. Jérmine would be excessively displeased. He hates nicknames and all that palaver. I thought you knew it, Blanche. I was surprised to find Margaret on your lap.'

Blanche's throat swelled.

'Well, I must go,' she said, rising. 'I'm sorry Margaret can't——'

'You mustn't go till Margaret has said she is sorry,' interrupted Flora. 'Margaret, tell Mrs. St. Roque instantly that you are sorry.'

But Margaret would not speak. She was disappointed and angry and impotent. And she hated Velvetine with all the strength of her sore heart.

'Margaret, speak this instant, or I shall send you to bed,' said Flora.

'She ought to be whipped,' remarked Mrs. Velvetine. 'I never interfere. But if she was under *my* charge, I should make Mitchell whip her.'

Margaret turned her large eyes upon the speaker. They were full of rage. Her nostrils were dilated. Her breast heaved.

'I should indeed,' added Mrs. Velvetine.

'Do you hear, Margaret?' said Flora.

Then Margaret's passion escaped.

'You sha'n't, you sha'n't!' she screamed, stamping her foot. 'If you do I'll kick you! By George, I'll kick you down stairs! You sha'n't touch me!'

She almost roared in her fury. Flora was aghast. She took the child's hand to lead her from the room. But Margaret repulsed her, and struck her with violence.

'Oh, you naughty girl!' cried Mrs. Velvetine.

'*Margaret!*' exclaimed Flora.

'I don't care! I don't care a hang,' shrieked the child. 'You're a beast, Velvetine, a beast, I say, a confounded beast!'

Mitchell came running in.

'O Lor!' cried the maid.

Margaret's face was scarlet. Tears were pouring down

her cheeks. She was contorting her body and brandishing her arms as if she were in agony.

‘Take her away!’ cried Flora.

But Margaret struck Mitchell and kicked her. She was beside herself.

‘You beast, you beast!’ she screamed, hitting wildly in the direction of Flora.

Then Blanche recovered her senses. She went up to the infuriated child, and caught hold of one of her hands.

‘Oh, my darling, don’t! You make me so sad,’ she said.

Margaret looked at her as if she did not understand. But she ceased screaming, and her agitated motions became calmer.

‘Don’t, my pretty, don’t!’ entreated Blanche.

She drew Margaret close to her, patting her head and murmuring incoherently. The poor child sobbed convulsively. Blanche led her away to a distant part of the large room.

‘Don’t, my pretty!’ she reiterated. ‘Don’t cry, my pet. It pains me to see you like this.’

Gradually Margaret’s sobs became gentler, and she lay quiescent in Blanche’s arms. But she did not speak. She was almost exhausted by her frenzy. Then Flora came across the room.

‘Well, are you going to be good now?’ she said, sternly. ‘You are a very naughty child—*very* naughty.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Blanche, hastily, and waving her away. ‘We are coming in a moment. Margaret, my darling,’ she went on, holding the trembling child closer to her, ‘I have to go away, and I can’t leave you like this. My pet, you weren’t good. You know you were not. You called Miss Velvetine such a bad, dreadful name, and you kicked her *and poor Mitchell—*kicked* them, darling! It was dreadful for me to see, my sweet. I could hardly bear it. Won’t you tell them you’re sorry?’

Margaret only sobbed in reply. Her sensitive pride was wounded to the core.

‘To please me, my own darling,’ urged Blanche. ‘I can’t leave you like this.’

Still the sobbing continued.

‘Darling! My own little Margaret! My dear, dear

pet! murmured Blanche: 'Won't you—to please me? Oh, darling, you make your Minimy-my *so* unhappy!'

Then the child's heart melted.

'Oh, I will, I will,' she wailed. 'Oh, my Minimy-my, I do love you so!'

'Then come, my darling,' said Blanche.

She led the child back to the place where Mrs. Velvetine and Flora and Mitchell stood, talking in undertones.

'Whatever will become of Miss Margaret, I don't know,' Mitchell said. 'She's a regular vixien. I never could think it!'

'If she were *my* child,—' began Flora.

'Margaret is very sorry,' said Blanche, approaching, with her arm about the child's neck. 'Margaret darling, say you are sorry.'

Margaret could scarcely speak for sobbing. But she obeyed the gentle lady.

'I'm—sor-ry,' she gasped. 'I beg—your pardon.'

'Go to bed, Margaret,' said Flora, coldly. 'Mitchell, put Miss Margaret to bed at once.'

'Please don't be angry with her, Flora dear,' pleaded Blanche, as the little figure vanished and Mitchell closed the door. 'I think she was disappointed. She told me she wanted to hear the organ so much. It was stupid of me to mention it before her. Please don't punish her, Flora.'

'I make no promises,' said Flora. 'The child is under my charge, and I shall do what I think right. She is desperately naughty, as you see.'

'But you talked about whipping,' protested Blanche. 'You wouldn't whip her really, Flora? It hurts the feelings of a big girl.'

'I sha'n't whip her,' said Flora. 'That is against Mr. Jermine's orders. Mamma, you always will interfere. Why did you speak of whipping?'

'Because I never saw a worse disposition anywhere,' replied Mrs. Velvetine. 'I never interfere, but I can't sit by and not say what I think. Are you going, Blanche? Good-bye, my dear. I hope you find your husband's children less unruly than the specimen here.'

'Poor little thing!' said Blanche tenderly.

'She went away full of sorrow.'

'I wouldn't let Flora bring up Cecily,' she said to herself.

'Blanche St. Roque is a fool,' said Flora, energetically poking the fire.

Then she took her pen and wrote a letter to her philosophic patron, telling him that she was doing all in her power to restrain Margaret's emotional tendencies, but that, *malgré tout*, Margaret had that afternoon displayed a quite alarming passionateness at being deprived of the purely emotional pleasure of attending a musical service. To this epistle, Jermine returned a laconic answer.

'Dear Miss Velvetine,' he wrote. 'I have been—and am—entirely convinced that your mode of treatment of my daughter is, in all respects, such as I approve. With my compliments to your mother and yourself,

'Believe me,

'Yours very truly,

'CHARLES JERMINE.'

At the moment when Jermine was thus curtly replying to Flora's missive, Margaret was standing before her governess, her attitude dejected, her eyelids swelled with crying, and an expression of bitter animosity upon her face. It was noon. The pale January sun was shining obliquely into the drawing-room. Flora had just entered the apartment, in walking-dress and with a bunch of violets in her hand. She had not seen Margaret since the terrible scene of the previous day. She had ordered Mitchell to give Miss Margaret her breakfast in a room apart. Margaret, who was at the piano, did not stop playing when Flora came into the room, and it seemed to Flora that this was an act of insolent insubordination. She came across the room quickly and tapped the piano sharply with her hand.

'Why don't you stop playing?' she said. 'Don't you see me?'

Margaret took her hands off the keys. ..

'Why don't you stand up when I speak to you?' proceeded Flora. 'Come here.'

She sat down and motioned Margaret to place herself before her. The little girl complied without a word.

'Don't stand on one foot,' said Flora, with irritation. 'I've told you of that trick a hundred times.'

Margaret altered her position.

'Keep your hands still,' added Flora. 'It's most unladylike to fumble with your fingers.'

Margaret let her hands fall listlessly to her sides. Again it seemed to Flora that her act was impertinent.

'I suppose you are aware, Margaret, how scandalously naughty you were yesterday,' she said. 'Indeed, you made a perfectly disgraceful exhibition of yourself. I was quite ashamed of you, and I should have thought that even *you* would have been ashamed of yourself.'

Margaret was ashamed. Her innate dignity was as much hurt by the remembrance that she had screamed aloud, that she had kicked and struck Velvetine and Mitchell, and that she had called Velvetine a bad name, as it had been by the affront that Mrs. Velvetine had put upon her. She knew that if Henry had witnessed her fit of passion, he would have held her in contempt for many a day. He would have told her that it was quite unworthy of a gentleman to treat such people as Velvetine and Mitchell in such a way. She had cried for hours at the thought that she would thus have fallen in Henry's esteem, and she felt as if her sudden outbreak of caddishness had damned her for ever. But she would have died sooner than admit this to Velvetine. So she looked aside and said nothing.

'Aren't you ashamed of having exposed yourself in such a way?' Flora went on. 'Aren't you shocked at your own behaviour? I couldn't have believed that even *you* could have forgotten yourself so entirely! Aren't you ashamed? Aren't you sorry?'

Margaret did not speak.

'Have you nothing to say?' cried Flora. 'Are you so naughty that you haven't one spark of shame?'

She paused a moment. But Margaret continued to stare in the contrary direction.

'Look at me!' exclaimed Flora, impatiently. 'How dare you look out of the window when I am finding fault with you? Do you know what you did yesterday? Do you know that you were outrageously impertinent to Mrs. St. Roque? Do you know that your behaviour to me and to my mother and Mitchell defies all classification? I tell you, I never saw such a frightful display of temper in my life. Have you nothing to say for yourself?'

No. Margaret had nothing to say. She was only thinking

that Velvetine was a great big bully, and that she hated her.

'I have written to your father and told him all about it,' said Flora.

Then Margaret opened her lips. Nature was too strong for her, and in a moment she forgot that her eyes were still sore with crying because she had cheeked Velvetine and behaved like a cad and incurred Henry's reprobation, if he knew.

'I don't care,' she said, doggedly. 'I don't care a hang.'

'Then I am *very* angry with you,' said Flora.

'I don't care,' repeated Margaret.

'I shall punish you, you naughty girl!'

'Do!'

'Go to bed this instant, Margaret. You are the rudest child I ever saw!'

'I haven't done my practice.'

'Then practise at once, and go to bed the minute you have finished!' cried Flora. 'Don't let me see you again to-day. I never saw any one so naughty in my life—never!'

She got up hastily and left the room. She was defeated, and she knew it. But she was the superior in age and position, and she had been able to secure the last word, and to inflict further punishment. In her haste, she dropped her violets, without noticing them. Later in the day she remembered them, and went to pick them up. But they were not to be found.

'There was a nasty mess on the floor, my dear,' she told Blanche. 'The horrid child had trampled them into the carpet. She is a regular little fiend.'

'Poor little thing!' said Blanche. 'I always find her so sweet and affectionate.'

'That is just what Mr. Jermine doesn't wish her to be,' said Flora. 'He wants her to have a calm, unruffled mind, and he wishes me to do all I can to curb her wayward, passionate temper. The next time she is so fearfully naughty I shall try another method. I am resolved to break her spirit, and when she attempts this sort of thing again, I shall come down upon her with a rod of iron.'

'Oh, don't, dear!' cried Blanche.

'What do you suppose I am going to do, my dear?' demanded Flora, contemptuously. 'I'm not going to beat

the child to death, or starve her, or chain her up in a kennel, or do any of the things one reads of in the paper sometimes. I am not *cruel*, Blanche. All I want is to break her spirit, and give her a philosophic mind, like her father's.'

'But how can you do it?' asked Blanche.

'Oh, I shall find ways and means,' returned Flora.

'But *how*, my dear?' urged Blanche.

'Oh, trust me,' said Flora, nodding her head. 'I mean to conquer—come what will.'

Whereat Blanche shuddered, and privately asked her husband if he could not interfere.

'Of course I'm very fond of Flora Velvetine,' she said. 'But she has never been fond of children, and I don't think she understands Margaret. And it does seem a shame that all the world should be against one poor little girl. Couldn't you speak to Mr. Jermine, Adrian?'

But St. Roque thought that he could not interfere.

'I'm very sorry,' he said. 'But what could I say? Jermine knows Miss Velvetine quite well, and he knows she is as hard-hearted as a stone. No one can look at her twice without seeing that. The child isn't ill, and she didn't complain to you. I don't see on what grounds I could speak, especially as there is no particular friendship between Jermine and me.'

'I see what you mean,' returned Blanche, plaintively. 'But can't you suggest anything? I thought you were so *very* clever, Adrian. And you a member of Parliament, too!'

Thus put upon his mettle, St. Roque thought of an expedient.

'Suppose you were to write in confidence to Dr. Wheble,' he said. 'Give him a hint that you think Miss Velvetine is too severe. He has more access to Jermine than any one else.'

Which suggestion Blanche carried out, and forthwith indited a long and somewhat incoherent letter to Wheble, over which he smiled and sighed alternately.

'Bless her heart!' he ejaculated, when he had mastered her meaning. 'She's a very sweet creature, and I honour her.'

And he returned her a sorrowful answer, saying he was well aware that Margaret's character was being submitted to

a fiery ordeal, but that he had no power to hinder the strange course of her bringing-up, having already remonstrated with her father many times upon the subject, and to no purpose. All he could do was to deprecate the use of harsh measures towards her, and Mrs. St. Roque might rest assured that he would always use such influence as he possessed to protect the child from undue coercion.

With this promise Blanche was compelled to be satisfied, and the interests of her new life gradually drove Margaret Jerminé out of her thoughts. A grievance must be multiplied ere it can hope for redress. What does a single heart-ache signify? One little child's sorrowful sighing does not reach far. A mob must groan before the busy world stops to listen.

But Flora's rod of iron was never called into requisition. Margaret was never again actively and uncontrollably naughty. The ebullition of rage in Harley Street marked an epoch in her life. Childishness lay behind it. Now her better and stronger nature began to develop.

CHAPTER X.

Malgré tout, the seasons revolve. Nature knows neither ruth nor sympathy. She smiles while we bury our dead—if it be her whim to smile. She weeps when the bridal-bells are pealing—if it be her whim to weep. To her, Man is not the lord of the creation. His griefs and pains are matters of total indifference to her. If an eager heart be breaking—still the west wind blows! If there be a veiled tragedy beneath some sober suit—nathless the roses are red and sweet! If there be a disappointment in some swelling breast, tears in some timid eyes, a weight here, a burden there, an unfulfilment on this hand and a denial on that,—what matters it? There is the sea in its beauty, and the mountains in their grandeur, and the violets, and the cowslips, and the long summer days, and the superb lilies, and the great yellow plums, and the hoar-frost, and Christmas, and then the violets again, and the hayfields, and the orchards—and so on, and so on! The Universe was not made for Man, and Nature sweeps by, while he stands shuddering to see some fair thing distorted by circumstances.

Many summers and winters rolled over Margaret Jermine's head, and no one said, This great wickedness shall not be! Neither Man nor Nature intervened, and she grew to womanhood almost isolated from human intercourse. She was intensely solitary. Sometimes she would stand at the spot where Bensley had dragged her out of the mere, and she would wish that he had not dragged her out. For as she grew older she felt that life was not good, and that she would rather be dead. She would look across to the island, and envy her young mother in her grave. Occasionally she saw Wheble. Once, soon after her return from Harley Street, she had spent a long, delightful Sunday at his house, and

his nieces had made much of her, and she had gone home with an unwonted smile on her face. But there was no repetition of the sweet event. Miss Velvetine had felt it to be her duty to inform Jerminé of it, and he had thanked her politely, and desired her to forbid Margaret to leave the grounds, except on horseback, and on no account to enter anywhere. The poor child acquiesced without remonstrance. She would ride past the lodge-gates of Bartropps and of Beaulieu, and past the door of Gladestreet House, sighing, but obedient. No one invaded the seclusion of Ule. The St. Roques were seldom at home. Mrs. Minimy was generally away, and when she and Henry were at Bartropps, the Velvetines and Margaret were gone abroad. Twice or thrice in the year Miss Velvetine and her mother conducted Margaret to the historic towns, and the beautiful scenery of Europe. Soon Margaret recognised that Henry's return home was the signal for her departure. She acquiesced in this also, and as time went on the great original pain of separation became dulled, and the remembrance of her joy in Henry's companionship grew dim. But Henry's precepts lived and strengthened. After a time she forgot that it was he who had imposed upon her the duty of being perfectly upright and honourable, and who had told her that it was caddish to take advantage, and to be rude. But if she forgot her teacher, she did not forget her lesson. And she was scrupulously obedient, absolutely truthful, entirely trustworthy.

'I have broken her spirit,' Miss Velvetine said, triumphing.

Margaret soon outstripped her governess, and Pinington stayed later, and a music-master came once a fortnight from a distant town. Pinington delighted in teaching her. Her intelligence was unrivalled, and he led her through a course of history, of philosophy, of natural science, in a masterly way. Margaret loved her books, and she loved Nature, and, most of all, she loved music. She had music-lessons from the greatest masters in every land, and they all regarded her with interest. But she was not taken to concerts, because concerts appealed to the emotions, and seldom to religious services, for the same reason, and she had read no fiction. But she knew that men had bled for Helen, and that Odysseus had wearied to see Penelope again, and that

Antony had loved Cleopatra, and she thought about these things, and wondered. And she had also read the Bible, and she knew that Jacob had served fourteen years for Rachel, and that David's love for Jonathan had passed the love of women, and that the father of the prodigal son had fallen on his neck and kissed him, and she thought about these things, too, and wondered. She was always grave. Whether she was playing on her beloved piano, or talking earnestly to Pinington, or gathering flowers in the woods, or reading her favourite books when she was alone on Sundays, she rarely smiled. Periodically, Wheble remonstrated with Jermine.

'I don't know what that girl will turn out,' he said one day. 'I've just parted with her.'

'I saw her,' said Jermine. 'She had been gathering wild roses.'

'Well, and weren't you ashamed of yourself?' cried Wheble. 'Didn't she look like a statue?'

'No. She looked as I wish her to look—like a person who finds a chief pleasure in the contemplation of natural beauty. Didn't you remark how she gazed at the sky?'

'Yes—with a face as grave as a judge. It made my heart ache to see her.'

'I am sorry for that, Wheble.'

'Tch!' exclaimed Wheble, angrily. 'What do you suppose she said to me?'

'What?'

'She looked at me with such expressive eyes that I could have wept, and said, "Dr. Wheble, how long do people generally live? Must I live till I am seventy?"'

'Well?' said Jermine.

'If either of my nieces were to ask me such a question, I should be heartbroken,' said Wheble.

'I am rejoiced to perceive that my daughter's pleasures consist in exactly the things I intended should please her,' observed Jermine. 'Pinington says her intellectual calibre is fine. Her memory is retentive, her intelligence large, her penetration keen. She has stores of interests in study, in music, in the love of Nature.'

'Love of Nature! The devil take you and your love of Nature, Jermine! It's the love of *persons* that a young woman needs.'

'Nay, Wheble. A young woman needs happiness, and persons who are born to die cannot give this. It is my most earnest wish that Margaret's capacity for loving should be extinguished. I have great hopes that it has been extinguished.'

'Bosh! It is not extinguished. It is only starved. You are mutilating your daughter as surely as if you were cutting off one of her limbs. Don't you see, man, that something wiser than you has composed the human structure? One of its component parts is the capacity for loving. Eliminate that, and you mar the perfect whole.'

'No, Wheble. I only seek to eradicate that which brings about a cruel evil. Love of drink, love of place and power, love of ease, are also parts of the human structure. They are poisonous, and we strive to uproot them. So is the capacity for loving.'

'Your argument is no argument, Jermine. The capacity for loving is inherent in the whole human race. The other capacities of which you speak are only inherent in individuals. They are diseases, and to indulge in them is evil. Not to indulge in the other is unnatural, and creates disease. I tell you, you are robbing your own child of the possibility of perfection.'

'I am sorry you think so, Wheble. I am convinced that my plan is legitimate, and that my daughter will be a happy woman.'

'She is seventeen, and she is already hoping she will not live to be seventy,' sighed Wheble. 'At her age, it is unnatural that she should think of such a thing at all.'

'She has studied philosophy,' said Jermine.

Wheble shrugged his shoulders and said no more. He never argued with Jermine with any hope of pushing his argument home. He argued only to relieve his own mind.

'She is as beautiful as Aphrodite,' he said to himself the next morning, thinking about her as he smoked his after-breakfast pipe. 'If I were a young man, I'd run away with her.'

It was Sunday, and it happened to be one of the rare occasions when Margaret went to church. She did not like church-going. She was too completely the pupil of a sceptic to believe in the value of sects or churches. She had no theologic instincts. Taught by Pinington to regard

sin as disease, the prayers jarred upon her. The sermon generally seemed to her to be foolish, and the music distressed her greatly. The choir sang flat, and the harmonium was a poor instrument and ill played. But Miss Velvetine liked to be seen in the Ule pew in the chancel, and twice or thrice a year she would invite her pupil to come to church in order that she might be seen there. Margaret always complied. But she behaved oddly, and Miss Velvetine only asked her to come sufficiently often to gratify her own vanity. When Margaret had been a little girl Flora had made her conform to custom, and had scolded her for any eccentricity of conduct. But she was afraid of her pupil now.

Margaret had grown to be taller than her governess, and there was a strange dignity in her demeanour which had long ago caused Flora to cease to order her about. Margaret never rebelled, certainly. But Miss Velvetine no longer asserted her authority. She had no need. The perverse child had lapsed into the perfectly docile girl.

Margaret's appearance in church upon this Sunday somewhat annoyed the rector. For it was Trinity Sunday, and he had carefully prepared a dogmatic sermon, explanatory of the nature of the Triune God, and he knew that, instead of listening attentively to his discourse, his whole flock would sit gazing at the Ule pew. It was so seldom that the beautiful young lady from Ule was to be seen, that, when she did appear, no man or boy could take his eyes off her face, and even when the face was hidden behind the high and stately walls of the family pew, none knew better than the rector that the minds of his congregation would continue to wander, although their eyes could no longer feast. Wheble, sitting in the middle aisle with his nieces, looked with his fellow-worshippers, and wished again that he were a young man. The Bartropps pew was empty. Henry Bartropps was at college.

'Why doesn't he come and run away with her?' thought Wheble.

But Henry had never seen his little playfellow since he had said good-bye to her on the night before his first going to Eton, and he did not know that she was as beautiful as Aphrodite, and as sad as patience smiling at grief.

There was a hymn before the sermon, and by accident the rector gave out the wrong number. The harmonium

and the choir were packed away in a gallery at the west end. There was no means of attracting the rector's notice. Besides, the choir-master was ambitious. Though it was Trinity Sunday, and the hymn was not appropriate, he whispered to his little band to try their best. It was Charles Wesley's most devout and touching hymn.

' Jesu, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the gathering waters roll
While the tempest still is high :
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life be past ;
Safe into the haven guide,
Oh, receive my soul at last.

' Other refuge have I none ;
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee ;
Leave, ah, leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me.
All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring ;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing.'

It was ill rendered. But this mattered little. For a flood of voice issued from the chancel, from the lips of the beautiful girl who stood there, forgetful of her surroundings, full of emotion, singing from her heart, and as if that heart would break. She did not fully understand. But she was lonely and defenceless, and the sentiment appealed to her.

'Margaret, Margaret !' whispered Flora, plucking at her sleeve.

But Margaret sang on.

' Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing.'

That was the end. The next verse failed to attract her. She knew nothing about sin or grace except as controversial terms. It was many years since any one had told her that she was the naughtiest little girl in the world. Her voice shook. She faltered. She raised her eyes and looked round her, bewildered, frightened, abashed. Then she sank down into the seclusion of the great pew with its high walls. No

one saw her again during that service except the rector, who could look into the chancel pews from his exalted position in the pulpit, and who reported that she had been half lying on the floor during the whole of his sermon, and that, although she had never lifted her face, he had every reason to believe that she had wept profusely.

Margaret heard no word of the homily on the Trinity. She was occupied in stifling her sobs, and her mind was filled with unaccountable feelings and with the memories of long-forgotten ideas. It seemed to her that she was a little girl again, and that once more she believed her mother to be in heaven, playing upon a golden harp, and once more she yearned to hear that celestial harping. Once more she seemed to be listening wounded to her boy companion's rough oburgations. Once more she seemed to hear with rapture his declaration that he loved her. Then, again, a sense of her aloofness from the world rushed upon her, and she wept afresh. The words of the hymn were almost obliterated from her consciousness. But their effect remained, and she recognised that she stood alone.

When Flora touched her upon the arm and told her that the rest of the congregation had withdrawn, she awoke as from a dream, and crept out of church shamefaced. She was astonished at what she had done, and she hardly knew what it was that had so greatly disturbed her equanimity. For much as she loved music, she scarcely knew its power. She had never heard a full orchestra or a grand organ, or even a stringed quartet. Once or twice in Germany she had been moved by hearing a band. But Flora had taken care that she should not often hear bands. Never before had she forgotten herself so strangely, and she was perplexed.

'What were you thinking of?' exclaimed Miss Velvetine. 'I would ~~have~~ made you come out, only I didn't want to make more of an exhibition of you than was absolutely necessary. It ~~was~~ intolerable! How could you think of singing out loud in that manner, and then crying and sobbing as if some one had beaten you? I was quite ashamed of you! I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourself!' she cried, irascibly.

Margaret did not reply. She seldom replied to Miss Velvetine's torrents of remarks and assertions. She loved her governess no better at seventeen than she had loved her

at eight. But she had grown in dignity. She no longer needed to be told that she must be a lady and keep a civil tongue in her head.

'What did you do it for?' demanded Miss Velvetine, after a minute.

'I don't know,' said Margaret.

'You don't know!' echoed Flora. 'That's what you always say. But you ought to know. It was an unseemly exhibition. I beg such a thing may never occur again.'

Margaret did not speak.

'I say, I beg such a thing may never occur again,' repeated Flora, rather loud. 'Do you hear?'

'Yes, Miss Velvetine.'

'Then why don't you answer?'

'I don't know.'

'Margaret, you provoke me! How dare you say you don't know? You *do* know quite well. It's because of your abominable temper. It's insufferable that you should give way to temper like this. Indeed, I won't stand it, and you are greatly mistaken if you think I shall. Answer me at once.'

'But what am I to answer?' asked Margaret.

She had been well educated. She had studied logic, and for an instant her lips parted in a faint smile of amusement.

'You know perfectly well,' returned Flora, reddening. 'This is mere impertinence. Your behaviour altogether is most discreditable to me. I sha'n't take you to church again for a very long time, you may depend upon that. Your conduct made me quite hot. I was never more annoyed in my life. I shall mention it to your father on the first opportunity. Indeed, I shall ask to see him to-morrow.'

Again the least possible smile hovered over Margaret's lips. Miss Velvetine remarked it, and it annoyed her. She was conscious that, although she could claim Margaret's obedience she had never won her respect, and the girl's calmness irritated her. She felt her pupil's superiority, and she resented it. It had been her business to bring up Margaret philosophically. Nevertheless, Margaret's philosophic bearing maddened her.

'Yes, I shall certainly see your father to-morrow,' she repeated. 'There must be no more of this.'

At which Margaret opened her lips to say that there should indeed be no repetition of such a scene, for she would not go to church again. But she did not speak the words.

'What were you going to say?' demanded Miss Velvetine, noticing the slight movement. 'I never knew any one with so many tricks as you, Margaret. Don't you know it's the most ill-bred thing in the world to begin a sentence and not finish it? You astonish me! It is the strangest thing that I can't make anything of you. First one thing, then another! Gross ill-behaviour in church—then ill-temper—now ill-manners. Flat refusal to answer questions—laughing in my very face at reproofs! Upon my word, you pass my comprehension. I shall come no further with you. You can walk home by yourself. I have no wish for your companionship. Go home, and be so good as to copy out the Epistle of Saint James this afternoon. And properly, mind! No blots, or erasures, or words left out, or you'll have to do it all over again. And to-morrow I shall see your father.'

Then Miss Velvetine turned back, and Margaret went to her solitary dinner and her uncongenial task. She was accustomed to long and tedious impositions, enforced upon her by Miss Velvetine. But to-day the copying of the Epistle of Saint James seemed to her to be intolerably irksome. It was a childish punishment, suggested by an inferior mind, and Margaret's womanhood rebelled against it. Her philosophic training alone enabled her to accomplish it. It had dawned upon her that she was no longer a child, and she had begun to dream of emancipation. Surely, she thought, she would not always be in subjection to Miss Velvetine's petty and tyrannical management! Surely Miss Velvetine would not stand between herself and her father for ever! She had never spoken to her father but once in her life. But were they to live apart permanently? And what was it that kept them apart? Why did a shadow hang over Ule? Why was she so carefully secluded? Why was she not allowed to associate with other people? Why might Miss Velvetine go to her father and not she? Why was his presence barred? Why did he conceal himself from her? What had she done? or he? She thought of the Minimy-my, who had been so dear to her, and of kind Mr. Hegel,

who had once kissed her, and of Henry Bartropps, to whom she had been so passionately attached. Why had the love within her been quenched? Why did not her father love her? Why might not she love him? Why was he withdrawn from her? Why was she shut out from him?

She left her sheets of paper on the table and went out. It was early June. The dog-roses were out, and the wild hyacinths had not yet faded. She gathered a posy, and as she did this she listened to the songs of the birds, and bethought her of the poet's lines :—

‘Do you ask what the birds say? The sparrow, the dove,
The linnet and thrush say, “I love and I love.”’

That stanza had occurred in her literature lessons. The most careful master cannot banish love from poetry, or poetry from literature. Instinctively she knew that love was sweet. She was shut out from it. Why? That was what perplexed her. Why?

She had reached a spot from whence, through an opening in the trees, she could see the waters of the mere, where the great lily-leaves were spreading their calm assertive amplitude. She stood there thinking vaguely, Why? Why is my life such as it is? Suddenly a boat shot into her range of vision. There was one man in it. It was her father. He rowed himself to the boat-house, and disappeared within it. Margaret knew that he was securing his boat in its place. She moved, and went nearer to the path along which he must presently pass, and looked through the bracken, stooping low and parting the undergrowth with one hand. In a few moments Jermine emerged from the boat-house and began to walk slowly towards home. His hands were clasped behind his back. His head was bent. A look of ineffable sadness was upon his countenance. Margaret's heart beat tumultuously. She thought that her father looked like a sorrowful and defeated god. A great longing arose in her soul. An unconquerable love asserted itself within her, and forced its way into expression. With a cry, she burst through the bracken and stood before him.

‘Father, father!’ she cried.

He looked at her, profoundly astonished.

‘Margaret!’ he ejaculated.

‘O father, love me, love me!’ she cried again.

She was trembling with excitement. She stretched out her hands. The flowers that she had been gathering fell to the ground. The birds sang on. The church-bells were pealing in the distance, because it was Trinity Sunday. The trees arched overhead, and the sun stole in falteringly through the branches, and kissed Margaret's soft hair, and lingered caressingly at her slender waist, and then slipped to her feet and lay there, quivering. But Margaret saw only her father.

'Love me, love me!' she cried once more. 'O father, love me!'

'Margaret, calm yourself,' he said, gently. 'What is it that you want?'

She could not answer. She was sobbing unrestrainedly. She covered her face with her hands.

'Come with me,' said Jermine.

He led the way to a rustic seat, which he had caused to be erected for himself in a place from whence he could see his wife's grave. Margaret followed him speechless. He motioned to her to be seated, and placed himself beside her. But he did not speak until her weeping had somewhat subsided.

'Now tell me what you want,' he said at last.

His tone chilled her.

'I don't know,' she faltered.

'That is not true,' said he. 'You want something. Speak, and tell me. Do not be afraid.'

But Margaret could not speak. Her father's demeanour was repressive. His voice discouraged her. She looked across the mere, and she, too, could see her mother's grave. She shuddered slightly.

'Shall I tell you what you wanted to say?' said Jermine, after a pause. 'You wanted to remind me that you had lost your mother and that you had never found your father. Was not that so? But hear me, Margaret. You imagine that I do not love you. Perhaps that is true. For your own sake, I have not suffered myself to love you. But I have cared for you diligently, and I have, I trust, provided for your entire happiness in the future. To this end I have striven to wean you from the love of loving. For Love is an incalculable pain. It means apprehension of loss while it lasts, and in the end—and the end comes soon—the

agony of separation. To save you from this agony, I have checked your powers of loving, and kept you from people who might have incited you to love. And I have refused either to love you myself, or to permit you to love me, in order that you might not presently lament my death. You see, therefore, that I have not been prompted by harshness, but by a desire that you should be happy. It is vain to suppose that happiness can reside in anything that is transitory, in anything of which time or circumstances can deprive us. True happiness is to be found only in the permanent, in the unalterable, in that which neither death nor solitude can remove. Love, which depends on companionship—and not only on companionship, but on special and individualised companionship—can never produce happiness, or at best only a selfish happiness for the one who is not left. The happiness that I desire to give you is changeless and eternal. If you were to drink the elixir of life, and were to survive countless generations, the happiness I have provided for you would never fail—nay, as the years gathered it would increase. I allude, you will understand, to the happiness engendered by the cultivation of the intellect, and by the contemplation of scenery. These will endure. There is no end to the acquiring of knowledge, and study will be fresh even when you are old. And, whatever betide, natural beauty will ever fill you with delight. All through your life, however long and painful it may be, the study of philosophy will give you keen pleasure, while even if you are deaf, a daisy will afford you gratification, and even if you are blind, the scent of violets and the blackbird's whistle will make you glad. None can take these tranquil enjoyments from you. They are yours throughout life—in poverty or in riches, in sickness or in health, in the country or in cities. Death alone will part you from them, and you will quit them without a pang, because they will not suffer at your departing.'

He paused. Margaret glanced at him fearfully. She was stricken with awe. His calm eyes seemed to petrify her.

'Hitherto, your youth has rendered you unfit to appreciate my efforts on your behalf,' proceeded Jermine. 'But you are no longer a mere child. Will you not aid me? Will you not help me to further my scheme for you?'

Margaret did not reply. She was hardly convinced. It

struck chillingly to her youthfulness to be told that the study of philosophy and the scent of violets would appeal to her and cause her pleasure in extreme old age. She looked again at the grave on the island, and sighed, envying her mother who had died so young. Then she looked mournfully at her father. She had cried to him to love her, and he had offered her a happy old age.

‘I do not think you acquiesce,’ said Jermine.

She did not acquiesce. Every instinct within her revolted against his cold arguments. She knew nothing about love. But nature would not be stifled, and she felt that it was good. But she did not know how to tell him that she would rather bear the passionate sorrows of love than enjoy the lifeless pleasures that he was offering her in their place. So she reverted to the childish formula that had aggravated some and withstood others.

‘I don’t know,’ she said, in a low voice.

‘I had hoped that you would co-operate with me,’ said Jermine. ‘I had hoped that, after seventeen years, the system I have pursued for your education would have borne some fruit.’

There was a mild reproach in his tone, which pierced Margaret to the heart. She perceived that her father was disappointed.

‘Oh, I will try, I will try!’ she cried impulsively. ‘I will do anything—anything you wish!’

‘Alas, to promise and to be are two very different things,’ he said. ‘It is easy to promise compliance. What I had hoped for was, that a natural compliance should have sprung up within you—that you would have imbibed my doctrines, and that they would be rooted in you, as the water-lilies are rooted in the mere.’

‘But I *will* try and comply!’ exclaimed Margaret. ‘Tell me—only tell me what you wish!’

Had she known it, her manner betrayed her unfitness for carrying out her father’s design. His disappointment increased.

‘I am a philosopher, and I have wished that my daughter should be a philosopher also,’ he said, quietly. ‘I have sketched the outlines of my philosophy to you, viz., that happiness is our goal, and that Love is misery, because it is fugitive and entails separation; therefore, that Love should

be ejected from our lives, and such joys cultivated as can never be taken from us. Are you really willing to render yourself to this idea ?'

'If you wish it,' she said.

'That is not the point,' he returned. 'I *do* wish it. But I desire that your compliance should be voluntary.'

'I can try,' she said.

'I urge my philosophy upon you for your own good,' he went on. 'Surely a happiness which endures through life is better than a fleeting joy which must inevitably bring sorrows in its train. Will you not forbear the desire for these false and foolish joys ? and will you not place your life's happiness on the firm basis that I have pointed out to you ? I speak this from my experience. I entreat you to be warned.'

'I can try,' she repeated.

'In the future, people will seek your friendship, and it may be that marriage will be suggested to you,' he continued. 'Believe me, it were better that you should neither make friends nor marry.'

'I shall not wish to marry,' said she, quickly.

There is a time in maidenhood at which filial affection, devotion to a brother or sister, heroic friendship, appeals more powerfully to the undeveloped imagination than the idea of wedded love. Margaret had reached this period. She had never thought of marriage, and it seemed to her now that the love of her father was all that she cared for or would ever desire. A woman would have smiled, amused, at Margaret's girlish remark. Jermine smiled. But he did so with unfeigned satisfaction. His philosophy had not investigated the phases of girlhood.

'You are certain that you will never wish to marry ?' he said.

'Yes.'

'That is well. In mature life, a calm, intellectual companionship is sometimes good. Marriage, which means love, is never good. I do not wish you to marry.'

'I shall not do so, father.'

'I am satisfied. You have lifted a great weight off my mind. I perceive that my system of education has not entirely failed, since you do not wish to marry.'

'No. I shall never wish to marry,' reiterated she.

She looked earnestly at her father. All she longed for

was to be able to clasp his hand. She had no conception of a more enthralling love.

‘I am satisfied,’ he repeated. ‘But you look tired, Margaret. You had better go indoors and rest.’

She left him without a word, and he sat for a time, pondering this strange interview.

‘She does not even wish to marry,’ he said to himself, thinking of the great passion of his own life. ‘Wheble is quite wrong, and I am right.’

In the evening he heard Margaret at her piano, and he smiled.

‘She is happy and content with her music,’ he thought.

But Margaret was playing the hymn that had been sung in church that morning, and her eyes were blinded with tears and her voice broke as she tried to sing

‘Jesu, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly!’

‘My system is good,’ said Jermine, closing the door of his study.

But his system was not good. To educate a human soul there is needed endless knowledge and boundless sympathy.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER this interview with her father, Margaret strove to attune her mind to the principles he had laid before her. She tried hard to adopt his mental attitude. She struggled to believe that the tranquil enjoyments of books and beautiful skies would suffice for her happiness for ever. And, endeavouring to be happy after her father's plan, she came to think that happiness was a very pitiful thing and a very poor goal. Moreover, she, who had read history, sometimes wondered whether it were possible that past ages might be right and her father wrong. Her loyalty would banish these obtrusive thoughts. But it could not destroy them, and they recurred continually.

One day in early spring Jermine sent a message to his daughter, desiring that she should come to him. It was Sunday, and she was alone. She was greatly surprised. But her heart bounded with hope, and she repaired to her father's presence immediately. Jermine was in the Italian garden, seated in a lounging-chair, with an open book upon his knee. It was a warm day, and the wind blew from the south. Narrow beds of crocuses intersected the gravel paths, and there was a *pyrus japonica* in full bloom upon the house. Jermine looked pale and thin, and, as she drew near, Margaret heard him cough. He perceived her light step upon the gravel, and rose to greet her, lifting his hat. He did not offer her his hand. But she held out hers, and he took it for an instant. Then he begged her to be seated. He had had a second chair brought forth on purpose for her. For a minute or two neither of them spoke. Then Jermine coughed again.

'Are you not well, father?,' asked Margaret, timidly.

'Thank you. I am not ill. I have had a bad cold, and

it has left me with a slight cough,' he said. 'But this indisposition has reminded me of that which a philosopher rarely forgets, but which he occasionally omits to bring vividly to his thoughts. I mean, it has reminded me of the inevitableness of death. I must die, and I may die prematurely and unexpectedly. I wish—as the phrase goes—to set my house in order first. That is why I have sent for you. I wish to speak to you about your future after my demise. There is no pain to either of us in speaking of such a subject. I have annihilated the pain of parting by refusing the indulgence of love. Therefore, we can discuss this fulfilment of Nature calmly.'

But there was pain. Margaret glanced at her father's pallid countenance, and thought that she would have died to save him from a single ache. Her self-discipline was indeed but superficial. For even as his measured sentences fell upon her ear, the tears gathered in her eyes, her heart beat faster, and she knew that she would have preferred the inevitable parting between herself and her father to be fraught with anguish. But she said nothing. She sat motionless, with bent head and folded hands, and Jermine did not see that her eyes were wet. He regarded her with some admiration. He thought that her attitude embodied a beautiful placidity. After a moment, he went on speaking.

'You are, of course, my sole heir,' he said. 'When I am dead you will be the owner of Ule, and the income I now enjoy will be yours. I am not now going to enter into monetary details with you. All my affairs are in order, and my executors are men of business, from whom you will learn all that you will want to know. From various sources I derive an income of about £15,000 a year. You will derive the same. Tell me how you propose to live, and what you propose to do with your money at my demise.'

'I don't know,' said Margaret. 'I have never thought.'

'It is not my wish that eventually you should entirely shut yourself from the world,' said Jermine. 'I have secluded you during the emotional and impressionable period of your life. But that period is drawing to a close, and unless my system of discipline has utterly failed, you will shortly be capable of going calmly into society, without danger to your happiness. Do you think that the discipline I have laid upon you has availed?'

Margaret was silent.

'I think that it has availed,' said he. 'Doubtless you will not have forgotten the conversation that took place between us some months ago in the woods near the mere. You gave me great satisfaction then by saying that you did not intend to marry. Does that intention remain fixed?'

'Yes,' said Margaret.

'I am glad. In the conversation that I have already recalled to your mind, you promised to try to carry out my views for you—that you would try to throw all your energies into the cultivation of those imperishable pleasures which alone can render you happy. Have you done so?'

'I have tried,' said she.

'And you find delight in the pursuit of the pleasures I pointed out to you?'

'Ye—es.'

'You speak with hesitation. Let me assure you that you will find greater delight in the pleasures I have suggested in the course of time.'

'Yes.'

'*Seek* to find greater delight in them, I entreat you,' he said, earnestly. 'Do not be deceived into imagining that Love is better. It will forsake you in your utmost need, and leave you empty and desolate.'

There was a brief pause. Then Margaret raised her eyes and looked at her father. A bright colour had rushed into her cheeks.

'Why did Nature implant the instinct of Love in the heart of man, if it is to be resisted and destroyed?' she asked.

'That is a question that the wisest man cannot answer,' replied her father. 'There are limits beyond which our intelligence cannot go. But I myself hold this theory about it. I believe that, in the origin of things, Love was a purely maternal instinct, rudimentary in the rest of mankind, and rudimentary even in the mother-creature, except in relation to her offspring.'

'Is it not the result of civilisation?' said Margaret. 'Ought we to return to a pristine state?'

'If the pristine state be preferable to the state of civilisation, certainly,' replied he.

'But since things are as they are, and since the instinct you reprobate has long ceased to be rudimentary, would it

not be better to adapt oneself to that which seems inevitable, rather than to oppose oneself to the habit of generations?' she urged.

Jermine looked at her again, and his admiration increased. It was not usual, he was aware, that girls of eighteen—and Margaret was scarce yet eighteen—should be able to argue with so much justice and lucidity.

'You speak very well,' he replied. 'But you have fallen into a common error in supposing that, because things are as they are, we are to make the best of them rather than seek to alter them. It is not so, believe me. If men and women had not been found to come forth from the ranks and denounce every evil practice which the world has known, depravity and paganism would still possess the earth—there would have been no Renaissance and no Reformation—duelling would still run rampant, and corrupt parliaments would still govern the people—there would have been no improvements in medicine, no social reforms, no abrogation of cruel laws—falsehood would never have been exposed, nor truth expounded. In all great movements, some one must advance. It is impossible that every one should resign himself to things as they are. Do I make my meaning clear?'

'Yes, father,' said Margaret, colouring. 'But it has struck me that this instinct which, you say, was once only rudimentary and confined to mothers, has become a primary factor in the ruling of events. The things you mention—duelling, paganism, and so forth—are not analogous to it. These are outside us. The other springs from within, almost without our control.'

'You seem to know more about it than I desired you should know,' said Jermine. 'Has it sprung up within *you*?'

'I don't know,' said she.

'Do you love Miss Velvetine?'

'No. Oh, no!'

'Or Mr. Pinington?'

'He is very kind.'

'Or any of the servants?'

'No.'

It did not occur to him to inquire with what degree of warmth she regarded Wheble. Nor did it occur to him to ask if she loved himself.

'Did Mr. Pinington tell you that love was a primary factor in the ruling of events?' he asked.

'No.'

'Then how did you conceive the idea?'

'It seemed to me to be historical,' she said.

'Historical?'

'It seemed to me that the greatest diplomatists have had to adapt themselves to human nature.'

'And it seemed to you that human nature and love were synonymous?'

'It did seem so. But forgive me, father, if I am wrong.'

'You are not wrong, Margaret. It *is* human nature to love. But I believe that it *is* human nature perverted. For humanity should be happy, and love has filled the world with sorrow.'

Margaret did not argue further. But she felt again that happiness was a poor and pitiful object.

'Now let us revert to your future,' said Jermine. 'I have arranged that, if I were to die shortly, you would come of age at eighteen. If I live, I propose that you shall presently possess greater liberty than you have as yet enjoyed. Tell me how you shall employ it.'

'I don't know,' said she.

'You must contemplate the idea and form an opinion,' said her father. 'If I live, we will discuss this question at greater length, when you have had time to meditate upon it. Should I die unexpectedly, you will find that I shall not have left you without counsel. I have written a letter to you, in which I have clearly expressed my views for you, and offered you advice respecting your life and society. In this letter I have not laid an undue burden upon you. I should like to feel sure that you will respect my latest injunctions. They are for your good.'

'I will try,' murmured Margaret.

'Thank you. Now I will not detain you longer. You were no doubt well occupied when I sent for you.'

Margaret rose obediently. But she lingered, looking at her father.

'Have you anything to say?' he asked.

'Yes, father. There is something I should like to say.'

'What is it, Margaret?'

'It may displease you.'

'Nay. A philosopher is never displeased. Tell me.'

'Oh, father, if you would once say to me—dear Margaret!'

Her voice sounded like a cry, and its suddenness and anguish startled Jermine. He looked at his daughter, disappointed. She was trembling. Her cheeks were flushed. Her eyes were moist and eager.

'And do you still hanker after this forbidden and foolish joy?' he said, with an unmoved demeanour. 'My poor friend, it is a treacherous and a cruel foe.'

'I am your child, father!' cried Margaret.

'You are my child by my earthly union,' he said, slowly. 'Be also the spiritual child of my philosophy. So shall we be indeed intellectually joined.'

Margaret retired from the Italian garden full of despondency. 'To be intellectually joined to her father seemed to her almost impossible. Her reading had been extensive, and the more she thought over the history and philosophy that she had studied, the less did her opinions seem to correspond with her father's views. It appeared to her that instinctive tendencies must be—in themselves—good. It seemed to her to be an impugning of the great law of evolution to suppose that universal inherence was an error. She was deeply perplexed. One day she unburdened herself to Pinington.

'You know what my father thinks about love,' she said, straightforwardly. 'What do *you* think?'

Pinington looked at her, somewhat confused.

'I loved when I was a young man,' he said, after a moment. 'That was a long time ago.'

'But you don't answer me,' said Margaret, pertinaciously. 'Do you agree with my father? Is love altogether an evil?'

'I loved when I was a young man,' repeated Pinington, stroking his beard. 'The lady I loved played me false and made me very unhappy. That was why I came to live on the island and devote myself to study.'

'Dear me, this is very interesting,' cried Miss Velvetine.

'It made you unhappy,' said Margaret, disregarding her. 'But did the unhappiness completely outweigh the former happiness?—I mean the happiness you experienced before she played you false?'

'It was very long ago. It was when I was quite a young man,' said Pinington.

'But did it?' persisted Margaret.

'I have done as your father did. I have withdrawn from society because I found that love was transitory,' said Pinington.

'But you and my father are instances,' argued the girl. 'Is it universal that the pain of love outbalances its pleasures?'

'I believe it is so,' returned Pinington. 'But most men will risk any pain for the sake of immediate gratification. It is the very few who can look forward. That is why any system, either of philosophy or religion, which depends on future rewards and punishments, must eventually fail. Such will never appeal to the masses.'

'Then you *do* think that my father's views are untenable?' said Margaret, quickly.

Pinington stroked his beard again, and got up nervously and shook down the knees of his trousers.

'I didn't say so,' he said. 'Remember you are not of the masses. With your education, the probability of a future pain ought far to outweigh any desire for a present gratification.'

'But if it does not?' said she.

'You are wasting Mr. Pinington's valuable time with your foolish chatter, Margaret,' said Flora, stiffly. 'Had you not better get to your work?'

Later, when Pinington had gone, and the two ladies were at dinner, Miss Velvetine took Margaret to task.

'You ought never to talk to gentlemen about love,' she said. 'It doesn't sound well.'

'I didn't know,' said Margaret simply. 'I am sorry.'

'It sounds so—so——' said Miss Velvetine. 'It sounds as if—— It's like—— In short, Margaret, it's almost improper!'

To which Margaret said nothing. But she thought much, and she longed greatly for the time when her father should send for her again and should ask if she had considered the problem of her future life. And as the spring days lengthened, the arrangement of her ideas became clearer and her determination more fixed, and she had resolved to tell her father that—notwithstanding her bringing-up—she

had come to think that his philosophy was erroneous, and to petition him to be allowed to mix freely in the world and to enjoy the pleasures of the affections.

On her birthday, Jermines sent for her. It was a sunny day. But the wind was chill, and Jermines sat within-doors, and beside the fire. He looked more ill than when Margaret had seen him in February, and his cough was incessant. He was coughing when she entered his presence, and could not for the moment speak to her. He made an effort to rise. But she begged him to remain seated, and sat down by him. The room was filled with flowers. Otherwise it was not a pretty chamber. Jermines had never collected works of art. Fire, he said, could destroy beautiful furniture and pictures.

'I am afraid you are very far from well, father,' said Margaret.

'I am not well,' he replied. 'But my ailment is more troublesome than serious. I shall be well soon. I sent for you, Margaret, to remind you that you are now eighteen, and that, as I told you some weeks ago, I consider that you are of an age to direct your own life. Have you thought about it? Have you come to a decision as to your mode of life in future?'

'Yes, father!' said Margaret.

'That is well,' rejoined he. 'I am glad that you have acquired the power of thinking, that you are able to form opinions and determine your wishes. Had you expressed hesitation, you would have inflicted a severe blow upon me. Tell me, now, what your decision has arrived at.'

But Margaret could not tell him. In his cold and stately presence, her impulses were checked. It seemed impossible for her to say to him, *Father, I have pondered your philosophy, and I have weighed it in the balance and found it wanting. I am desirous of throwing off the shackles with which you have fettered me. I wish to associate with my fellow-creatures. I wish to love and to be loved.* She felt unable to speak thus. And yet, if she did not speak thus she could not speak at all. She was silent. She was awed by her father's demeanour. He seemed like the incarnation of unimpassioned ceremony. Even when he coughed, he coughed as if he were a magnificent king and she a great queen, and both of them surrounded by a splendid retinue.

He was not pompous. But he was exquisite, superb, unapproachable. Long years of isolation of thought and manners had given him an almost invulnerable impassiveness. He had fixed his mind upon a single idea, until that idea had become his only idea, and until the line of thought emanating from it had become his second nature. Before this morbid strength, Margaret's healthy utterance was stayed. She could not speak her heart to this frigid and stately eccentric.

'You do not tell me the result of your cogitations,' he said, at last. 'I conclude, therefore, that you have no desire to alter—in any marked degree—the present attitude of your life. Although you are now of an age when coercion is no longer necessary, I suppose that you will perfectly agree with me in considering that study must still form the principal of your occupations. Thus premising that, in its essentials, your mode of life will be unaltered, I am desirous of knowing whether it would conduce to your happiness that any of its details should be modified.'

But Margaret, who desired only the subversion of the present conditions of her life, did not reply. Jermine misunderstood her silence.

'I see that you are content,' he said. 'That you—now you are grown up—should coincide with my arrangements, proves to me that my system of education has succeeded. Had it been otherwise, I should have been deeply disappointed. That you are in accord with me gives me the highest satisfaction. I have nothing else to wish for. You have, I understand, no modification of the *régime* under which you live to suggest?'

She had. But she could not disappoint him. She could not tell him that her soul panted for as different a life from that which he had devised for her, as is the existence of a Greenlander from that of an Italian.

'Still, if there be the slightest particular which seems to you to admit of improvement, I beg of you to mention it,' he added.

Apparently there was no particular in which she desired improvement, for she made no suggestion. He thought that her composure evinced a philosophic contentment. He did not know that his formality and his measured speech had frozen her. He did not suspect that she had bestowed upon him an unasked-for and idolatrous affection, and that

out of her love for him, she dared not lay her hand to his fabric to improve it, because, ere her improvements were completed, she knew that she must demolish his whole work and occasion him the acutest disappointment.

‘You enjoy much,’ he said, presently. ‘You study. That is well. Books will endure for ever, and new-born minds will continually suggest new and interesting trains of thought. You are musical. That also is well. You delight in the great beauties of nature. That is best. Were you deaf, or blind, or maimed—were you sick unto death—or should poverty overtake you—still the songs of birds and the fragrance of the fields and woods, the beauty of the sunset and of the returning spring, the glory of summer gardens and the splendour of ripe orchards, would be yours. Nothing but complete senility can rob you of the intensity of these joys, and few reach that awful stage. Be content, Margaret. You have chosen the wise path. And you have given me the only pleasure that it has ever been in your power to give me.’

‘Father, I am not what you think,’ cried Margaret, impetuously.

‘Nay,’ he returned, smiling gravely. ‘I dare say you are not yet wholly what I desire. It is probable that an exhilarating gallop gives you more pleasure now than the contemplation of an exquisite sky-line. You are still young, and youth—even at its wisest—must fulfil its physical exigencies. But that your mind is attuned to mine, I am convinced. And in that conviction I am well pleased now, and when the moment of death shall come, in that conviction I shall pass away without a murmur and without an unfulfilled wish. Now leave me. But before you go, take this letter which I have written for your future assistance. Do not read it till I am dead.’

He rose, opened a drawer in his writing-table, and took from it a sealed envelope.

‘It is the succinct and last expression of my ultimate conclusions,’ he said, giving it to her. ‘Farewell, Margaret, my intellectual child!’

She passed from him without remonstrance. She was awed, tongue-tied, spell-bound. It seemed to her that she had been in an unreal and deadly presence. It seemed to her as if her father were dying of some ghastly disease, of

which none had cognisance but herself. Moreover, it seemed to her that this strange and awful disease exercised some fascination over her. In its presence she had been unable to speak her mind. The words that had been upon her lips had remained unuttered. Her arguments had been reduced to nothingness before they had even been brought forward. She had been defeated without striking a single blow. She wrung her hands wildly, and then let them fall in despair. She could not help herself. It was impossible that she should deny to her father the comfort that he appeared to derive from her supposed acquiescence in his views. What should she do? She resolved at last that she would write a letter to her father, expressing her opinions and explaining her reasons for them, and couched in terms so tender and dutiful that he should not be wounded by her resistance to his will. When she had determined this, she went to the piano and played until she no longer felt wearied or distressed or defeated.

A few nights after this, the bell of Gladestreet House was rung violently at a late hour, and Wheble was bidden to come with all despatch to Ule. Jermine was very ill. He had broken a blood-vessel.

‘Where is Miss Jermine?’ said Wheble, when he saw his friend. ‘Go and fetch her instantly.’

It was clear to the physician that Jermine was at the point of death. The present hæmorrhage was not the first. He had been long ill, and Wheble had regarded his case with anxiety. He had wished to acquaint Margaret with her father’s state. But Jermine had forbidden him to do this. He had shrunk from a possible manifestation of solicitude on Margaret’s part, and he had lived so long lonely that the idea of any interference or enforced companionship distressed him.

‘Besides,’ he had added, with the hopefulness common in the disease to which he was succumbing, ‘I am not seriously ill. I shall be better soon, and if necessary, I will go abroad next winter.’

But he was not to go abroad next winter. Consumption, which had fallen upon him suddenly and unexpectedly, had also fallen upon him inexorably. It was not a family disease. How Jermine had acquired it none could say. Wheble

looked upon him as an abnormal specimen of humanity. Mentally and bodily he was an isolated creature.

'I have sent for Margaret,' said Wheble, bending over the dying man.

A faint smile answered him.

'You would like to see her?' pursued the doctor.

Jermine's lips moved. Wheble bent lower. But he could not catch the syllables that Jermine whispered. Then Margaret came hurriedly into the room. She was pale and trembling. Her hair fell to her waist in disorder. She looked slender and graceful in her undress. She came to the bedside and took her father's hand. He returned her pressure slightly. Again he strove to make himself heard. But neither Margaret nor Wheble could distinguish his words.

'What does he say? Oh, what does he say?' she cried, frantically.

She looked to Wheble to help her. For a moment he hesitated. Then he took a strong measure.

'Tell him you love him! Kiss him!' he whispered.

'Father, I love you, I love you!' cried the girl.

She stooped and kissed him—his forehead, his cheek, his struggling lips.

'Father, dear father, I love you!' she repeated.

Then Jermine made a profound effort.

'The letter,' he gasped. 'The letter—I wrote——'

Then he was seized with another hæmorrhage. Wheble put Margaret aside. She stood and watched. In a few minutes her father was dead.

CHAPTER XII.

GLADESHIRE is a county whose geographical position it is needless to particularise. Every one knows that it is neither adjacent to London, nor very far removed from it. Every one knows also that in mediæval times Gladeshire was a forest, and that it is still well wooded; and every one knows that its chief town is called Gladestreet, and that Gladestreet consists of one wide and picturesque street, and that it boasts a Norman church and an Elizabethan grammar school. People who know more—people who possess the *Peerage* and Burke's *Landed Gentry*, know that Gladeshire is the home of many ancient and aristocratic families, and such can speak glibly of Lord Restive of Restive, who has not visited Gladeshire for forty years, and of the Earl of Sans-Or, who has let his place to a millionaire whisky merchant, of the Jermines of Ule, and the Bartroppses of Bartroppps, of the St. Roques of Beaulieu, and the Dryads of Outwoods, of the Homers of Homer Court, and the Hathes of Hathe Place, and the Ifes of Red Oaks, of the Whebles of the north, and the Cleves of the east, and the Ingrains of the west.

In a certain year—was it 1878?—it may have been then, or a year sooner or later—who cares for an exact date?—it had come to pass that, notwithstanding his youth (for he was but twenty-five), Bartroppps of Bartroppps was the leading man in the county. The family of the Bartroppses was the oldest in Gladeshire, except the Jermines, and at this time the Jermines of Ule were represented by a woman, and, moreover by a young woman, who had been brought up under peculiar circumstances, who had been seen by few, and who had been travelling abroad for three years. So it

seemed natural that Bartropps of Bartropps should assume the foremost position in Gladeshire. No one tried to rival him. St. Roque of Beaulieu had given his whole mind to a parliamentary career. When he was in London he was steeped in public business. At home he was essentially domestic. Dryad of Outwoods was old and infirm, and rarely quitted his fireside; and his great-nephew and heir was a poet, who cared nothing for rank, or precedence, or public importance. The Cleves had been absent from Gladeshire for several years, and the promising younger son of the house had established himself in London, had prospered, and had become the chief clerk of the Tag, Rag and Bobtail Office. Most of the Whebles had become poor. Hathe of Hathe Place was apathetic, and he had six plain daughters to marry. Homer of Homer Court was indifferent, and he had four stupid sons to put forth into the world. The Ingrains had a large young family and small means, and Ife of Red Oaks drank. By right, and by circumstances, Henry Bartropps was pre-eminent.

'It's a pity Henry Bartropps isn't here,' observed Mr. Hathe to a little group who had gathered under the tulip-tree at Beaulieu, on the occasion of Mrs. St. Roque's first garden party after the parliamentary session. 'He might——'

'He isn't at home,' interrupted Mrs. Hathe with wifely unceremoniousness. 'Where are the girls? I asked Mr. Tally and Mr. Start to get them some tea. I don't see any of them now.'

'Oh, they'll re-appear, like Bo-Peep's flock,' said Mr. Homer. 'I hoped to have met Miss Jermine. She has come back, hasn't she?'

'Miss Jermine!' ejaculated Mrs. Hathe. 'I suppose it will be nothing now but Miss Jermine—Miss Jermine—all over the place. When young ladies are rich, they command a vast deal of attention.'

'And when they are *pretty*,' put in Mr. Homer.

'Pretty!' echoed Mrs. Hathe, sharply. 'And pray, how do you know she is pretty? And you the father of a family too! I am surprised that you should trouble your head about beauty.'

'Oh, all men do,' declared Mr. Homer, cheerfully. 'I'm not different from others, Mrs. Hathe. And as to Miss

Jermine's being pretty, every one knows she is. Though she didn't visit anywhere, she rode about a good deal in her father's life-time, and I frequently met her. I used to think her lovely.'

'I suppose she will marry now,' remarked Mrs. Homer, a pretty woman of five-and-forty.

'I don't know,' returned Mrs. Hathe, mysteriously. 'There are all sorts of stories afloat about Mr. Jermine's will.'

'Where's Pinington?' said Mr. Hathe. 'He ought to know. He was poor Jermine's intimate friend.'

'A pretty friend!' said Mrs. Hathe, scornfully. 'Why, he came off his island the moment Mr. Jermine died—the very moment! Before a month was out, he was boarding with the Velvetines. It made me lose all patience. The idea of Flora Velvetine making up to a poor demented creature, who isn't orthodox, and who had lived for years on an island like a lunatic! It tickled me very much when they got rid of him last year. "When one has a daughter, one has to be cautious," Mrs. Velvetine said to every one. The fact was, Miss Flora couldn't bring him to book. How should she? She hasn't sixpence. I don't believe Mr. Jermine left her more than £500.'

'I don't think it's that,' said Mrs. Homer in a gentle voice. 'My Bertha has no money, and yet, you see, she's going to be married. It's Flora Velvetine's being so plain and old-looking. Of course she is *not* young now, poor thing! It's thirteen years since she broke off her engagement. I know that, because it happened on your Louie's birthday. She was sixteen, you know, that very day, and she's nine-and-twenty now — just six years older than Bertha!'

'I hear the Cleves are coming back, and they say Lucius is coming down,' said Mr. Homer, quickly. 'Perhaps he and Miss Velvetine will make it up again.'

'Hardly,' said Mr. Hathe.

'He certainly might do better,' remarked Mr. Homer. 'Almost all the Gladeshire girls are pretty.'

'It would be a better compliment if you said they were all good and useful,' said Mrs. Hathe, frowning.

'Your girls are so very good, and so devoted to good works,' said Mrs. Homer, sweetly. 'I never could persuade my girls to do anything in that line. Of course, they are

much younger than yours, and always engaged right and left socially. Still, it *is* a pity that good works and good looks so seldom go hand in hand. When I heard Gladestreet had been presented to Mr. Tally, I said to myself,—“Louie Hathe! the very thing!”—I did indeed! And then when Mr. Start got the head-mastership of the grammar-school almost at the same instant——’

‘Who do you think Hathe and I met on the road?’ Mr. Homer broke in.

‘Who?’ asked his wife, serenely.

‘Why, Henry Bartropps!’ returned he. ‘He must have arrived unexpectedly. For he was in the station-fly, and I see Mrs. Minimy is here.’

‘I’m glad he’s come back,’ said Mr. Hathe. ‘He’s a thoroughly good fellow, and a credit to the county. The next thing is for him to marry. I’ve sometimes thought he was smitten with our young friend Cecily.’

‘He admires Bertha very much,’ said Mrs. Homer. ‘When he gave his congratulations, he said Ernest was a very lucky man.’

‘How you all exercise yourselves about these young people’s marriages!’ cried Mrs. Hathe. ‘It’s a thing I never think of.’

‘I dare say not,’ returned Mrs. Homer, softly. ‘You’ve never had to prepare a trousseau and send out invitations for a wedding breakfast. When you have, you’ll find how prominent the subject becomes.’

‘How very red in the face poor dear Mrs. Hathe is getting!’ observed Mrs. Minimy to Mrs. Velvetine. ‘Sometimes I almost think she must have a fit. I really often wonder how poor Mr. Hathe could marry her. I am not surprised that the girls are plain. As to Louie, her face is crimson. It is quite painful to see her. Had Mrs. Hathe money, do you know? Men must marry for some reason.’

‘I really couldn’t say,’ replied Mrs. Velvetine, with acrimony. ‘All men seem to me to act on stupid principles. There’s too much marrying, and I don’t approve of it. The girls fling themselves at the richest men—widowers or what not—just for the sake of marrying. I call it a very unworthy state of things. What I admire is high-mindedness. I congratulated myself on Flora when she told me she’d had the good feeling to break off her first engagement.

She didn't care for Lucius Cleve—didn't really love him. I respected my daughter. It would have been a distinct marriage of convenience, and she was too womanly to do it. I call it unreservedly unwomanly to marry except for a right motive.'

'We all think so,' said Mrs. Ife, gravely.

'I hear Mr. Cleve is coming down,' observed Mrs. Minimy. 'I shall like to see him again. He used to be a great favourite of mine. He had such a nice skin. That was what I thoroughly liked in him. He always looked clean. Fair men do. I'm glad Blanche's boys are fair. I was so afraid they might be dark, like their father. I hardly dared look at little Adrian. But he is as fair as dear Blanche. I must say, I do like a good complexion. Now Henry's complexion is excellent—so clear. I call him a remarkably handsome young man.'

'So do I,' acquiesced Mrs. Ife.

'Handsome is that handsome does,' said Mrs. Velvetine. 'People say Margaret Jermine is a beauty. I must say I never saw it, nor Flora either. She always was a hard-hearted little monkey, and absolutely forgetful of past kindnesses. I never thought she behaved well when her father died. Her conduct to Flora was most pointedly rude and arrogant. She threw aside all restraints—quite lost her head, in fact. Of course poor Mr. Jermine oughtn't to have made her come of age at eighteen. It was the one thing he didn't consult Flora about. The girl lost her balance, and all her careful education was thrown to the winds. Flora was hurt to the last degree. She fully intended to live with Margaret and carry out all Mr. Jermine's designs. No one else could do it. But Flora was entirely in his confidence. She knew his mind to a T. Indeed, I quite thought at one time——But Flora was too high-minded. She didn't encourage it. We both knew quite well what Mr. Jermine wished. But we resolutely held aloof. Flora's head is never turned.'

'But how did Miss Jermine offend her?' asked Mrs. Ife. 'I was away when Mr. Jermine died, and heard very little about it.'

'Poor man!' murmured Mrs. Minimy. 'He died of the most rapid consumption. He was only ill three or four months, and he wouldn't believe he was in danger. Poor

Margaret had no idea. She felt it dreadfully. Dr. Wheble said she must have change. That was why she went abroad.'

'She ought to have gone with Flora,' said Mrs. Velvetine, decidedly. 'There is no question about it in my mind. Flora knew Mr. Jermine's sentiments, and she could have completed the girl's education properly. As it is, I expect she is quite ruined.'

'I have seen her, and she is lovely—quite lovely,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'I used to be distressed about her complexion when she was a little girl. But Miss Ovid has done wonders, and it is faultless. I don't know what lotion she used. Very likely Dr. Wheble invented something special.'

'Then when did Miss Jermine arrive?' inquired Mrs. Ife.

'The day before yesterday,' replied Mrs. Minimy. 'I went to see her yesterday, and she was as sweet and affectionate as possible. She and Miss Ovid seemed so happy together, and it was the prettiest sight to see Margaret with Dr. Wheble.'

'When were you there? What time, I mean?' asked Mrs. Velvetine, sharply.

'Well, about twelve, I think,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'I can't be quite sure, because I walked, for a wonder. Cecily came and fetched me, and we started soon after eleven, and I don't walk very fast. Then Blanche came, and she drove us back to luncheon here. It was quite touching to see the meeting between Blanche and the dear girl. Margaret cried. Indeed, we were all quite affected, and Dr. Wheble said, "Oh, you dear women, why did Heaven make you so sweet?"—or something like that. He stayed. I heard Margaret beg him to stay to lunch. And of course Isabee stayed too.'

'I think Margaret Jermine is insufferable,' cried Mrs. Velvetine. 'Flora called about half-past twelve, and she wasn't admitted. The servant said his mistress wouldn't receive till next week. And you were there the whole time, Mrs. Minimy! The whole world was there, in fact!'

'No, no, only the oldest friends,' pleaded Mrs. Minimy.

'And pray, who is an older friend than Flora?' asked Mrs. Velvetine, with anger. 'Who can have a greater claim than the lady who brought the girl up for ten years, and

sacrificed her whole life—all the best years of her young life—to her education? I call it nothing short of insulting, and except that I hate breeding dissension in a neighbourhood, neither Flora nor I would ever go to Ule again. But it is just what we might have expected: Margaret Jerminé is ungrateful by nature. Do you know, Mrs. Ife, after her father's death, she positively refused to see Flora? She shut herself up in her room, and nothing could get her out. She said her father had told her she was to come of age at eighteen, and she took the meanest advantage of her birthday having occurred two days before the death. She gave herself all sorts of airs, and when the will was read, she wrote to Flora and announced that she was going abroad directly with Miss Ovid. Poor Flora was terribly upset. Naturally she expected to be consulted. She had been Mr. Jerminé's confidante, and, as I told you between ourselves, she might have been the girl's stepmother, if she'd only said the word. But Margaret never even *saw* her! She banged the door in her face, so to speak, and took up with a perfect stranger. She didn't know Miss Ovid in the least.'

'I suppose that was Dr. Wheble's doing,' remarked Mrs. Ife.

'Undoubtedly. Probably Dr. Wheble had his own very good reasons for putting the rich heiress under his niece's charge,' returned Mrs. Velvetine.

'I suppose he thought she wanted change of companionship as well as change of scene,' said Mrs. Ife.

'I daresay,' assented Mrs. Velvetine, coughing slightly.

'There could have been no other reason,' added Mrs. Ife.

'Oh, couldn't there?' said Mrs. Velvetine. 'Well, I'm glad to hear it. I own I had my suspicions. Dr. Wheble is not so very old—under fifty, I fancy. Many men much older than Dr. Wheble have married young heiresses.'

'Oh, Mrs. Velvetine, I couldn't think of agreeing to such an idea!' cried Mrs. Minimy. 'I'm quite sure Dr. Wheble would never do such a thing. He is incapable of it. Every one knows he was attached to Margaret's mother. Besides, dear Margaret did know the Ovids. She spent a Sunday with them once, when she was quite little, and she never forgot Miss Ovid's kindness. Dr. Wheble told me so himself. Oh no! Such a thing as that is impossible.'

‘Nothing is impossible, Mrs. Minimy,’ said Mrs. Velvetine, stonily. ‘But I said nothing. Remember that. I merely made the very natural remark that older men than Dr. Wheble have married young heiresses. And I repeat it.’

Then Flora came up to the little group. Pinington was with her. Both were much changed. The latter was stout and cheerful. The former was thirty-two, and she was still Miss Velvetine. But she was no longer the pretty Miss Velvetine. She who had been slender, was meagre now to very scragginess. Her thin colourless lips had grown thinner and paler. The delicate bloom had left her cheeks. It seemed as if her nose and chin had elongated, as if her cheek-bones had protruded, as if her eyes had sunk. When she noticed these changes in her appearance—and she was too clever and observant not to notice them—she sometimes threw herself on her bed and wept hot, savage tears. She could not grow older gracefully. She kicked against the inevitable. She railed at her deplorable fate, at the circumstances of her life. That the circumstances were greatly of her own making did not console her. Nay, that thought made her more savage still. She had once been engaged to a man who had since prospered. She had dismissed him because Ule was in her sight and she had fancied it was in her grasp. But she had dismissed him too soon. For Jermine had never offered her marriage, and he had only left her £1,000, and she was still a governess and still Miss Velvetine, and now her youth and her good looks were gone. Something, she would cry in her rage, something ought to have intervened to keep her from dismissing Lucius Cleve, who had so soon attained wealth and honour. But to-day she was smiling. She had heard some good news.

‘Well, so we’ve got the young lady of Ule back,’ said Pinington. ‘I saw her yesterday. Indeed, she sent me a note, begging me to come when it suited me. It was wonderfully considerate of her. She said she should be at home all day, so I went up at five, and she and Miss Ovid gave me tea. It was very pleasant. I made bold to say she was improved, and what do you think she said—the little girl I used rather to snub in deference to poor Jermine’s idiosyncrasies!—why, she said, “Mr. Pinington, *you* are very much improved!” She didn’t laugh. But I did—till the tears came. I was always fond of the child.’

He laughed now, stroking his long grey beard with one hand, while he drummed nervously on his knee with the other.

'The dear girl!' said Mrs. Minimy. 'She said to me, almost at once, "And how is Mr. Pinington?" She forgets no one. She is charming. I wonder what Henry will think of her?'

'By the way, Henry has arrived,' announced Flora. 'Mr. Homer and Mr. Hathe met him.'

'Henry!' ejaculated Mrs. Minimy. 'Why, I didn't expect him till Saturday! Dear me, how provoking! The dear boy should have written. I suppose he telegraphed, and, you see, I lunched here. Where is Adrian? I must order the carriage and get off at once.'

'We are going to send the boys to school after Christmas, Mrs. St. Roque, and then we mean to have a French governess for the little girls,' said Mrs. Primulum, the doctor's wife. 'I wanted to tell you at once, because of Flora Velvetine. I fancy she expects to come to you when she leaves us.'

'But neither big Adrian nor I would hear of it!' cried Mrs. St. Roque. 'Of course, Flora is my friend, and I'm very fond of her. But I could *not* let her be my children's governess. It's different for you. You and Mr. Primulum are always in and out. But I have so much to do in London, and the schoolroom is at the top of the house, and I can't hear what goes on. I must have some one who is gentle. Flora never hit it off with poor little Margaret Jermine. Margaret was a darling. At least, mamma and I always thought so. But poor Flora always found fault with her. Once I saw quite a terrible scene between the two, and I really don't think Margaret was naughty. But Flora had no patience and no sympathy.'

'Poor Flora!' said Mrs. Primulum. 'She and I have always been friends, and I'm dreadfully sorry for her. But her coming to us as governess hasn't quite answered. You see, she and papa never get on. When the children aren't good, Flora always punishes them, and if papa hears of it, he always lets them off the punishment and gives them a dose. He says children are always good if they're well, and Flora says if that theory were carried out to its logical conclusion—she's so clever, you know!—every one would be

on the sick-list, and nobody would ever be hanged, and papa says that's what he'd like to see, and at all events so it shall be in his own family. And then Flora bites her lips, and one day she said something that I thought rather rude. But papa told me to take no notice, and he said Flora wanted a dose herself, and he'd offer it to her, only he didn't want to offend her.'

'What did she say?' asked Mrs. St. Roque.

'Well, I forget the exact words,' replied Mrs. Primulum. 'But I know it sounded offensive. It was something about amiable mediocrity. And she added—I remember that, because I was just running up a little bit of a tuck in Dorothy's frock—"I don't wonder Dr. Wheble laughs at you, Mr. Primulum." I thought that was very rude, especially as Dorothy was present. But papa told me not to mind. He said it was all stomach. He doesn't think the Velvetines live generously enough. Flora dines with us five days in the week. But he says five dinners a week isn't enough for her.'

'Flora is dreadfully hurt, because she hasn't seen Margaret Jermine yet,' observed Mrs. St. Roque. 'She attacked me about it quite fiercely just now. I said I couldn't help it. Of course I hurried to welcome the dear thing home. I couldn't tell she'd see me, and not Flora. But Flora says it was an unseemly display of rancour. It appears the very day poor Mr. Jermine died, Flora and Margaret had had words. That is, Flora says she had occasion to find fault with Margaret, and Margaret said nothing. But Flora says she is the most resentful girl she ever knew.'

'Well, we are extremely glad Miss Jermine has come back,' observed Mrs. Primulum. 'Ule has stood empty too long. It was as good as empty before Mr. Jermine died, he being so strange! I asked papa one day whether he thought Mr. Jermine was mad. But he's so cautious. He said poor Mr. Jermine wasn't his patient. But he told me, between ourselves, that he thought it was very likely chronic indigestion.'

'Dear Margaret was so sweet,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'I asked her to come here to-day. She said she couldn't face the whole county all at once, but she'd come and lunch with us quietly to-morrow—just to meet mamma. She longs

to see my chicks. Miss Ovid says she has a perfect passion for children. I'm sure she can't be really resentful, or she wouldn't have been so cordial to me. You see, I hadn't seen her for thirteen years. I do feel ashamed now. I ought to have made efforts. But you see, little Adrian was born, and then Theophilus, and then the little girls, and we are so much in town, and big Adrian is such an engrossing husband. He likes me to sit with him, even if he can't talk to me. And then Cecily came out. What with one thing and another, I'm afraid I didn't think much of poor darling Margaret. However, Flora says I couldn't have done anything. She says Mr. Jermine wouldn't have allowed Margaret to come here on any account.'

'Papa thinks poor Flora would like to have become Mrs. Jermine,' said Mrs. Primulum.

'I dare say she would,' acquiesced Mrs. St. Roque, cheerfully. 'I'm quite sure she's rather disappointed, because she used to talk so much about whom she should marry, when we were girls. I'm not sure she' didn't once think of big Adrian. I told him once he'd better have married her, because she's clever. It was after I'd made one of my foolish mistakes. It was just before little Adrian was born, and I was rather tired with a drive, and I said, "Which of Dickens's books does Sir Toby Belch come in?" I don't know what made me think of Sir Toby Belch at all. It was very funny. So when big Adrian smiled, I said, "You'd better have married Flora Velvetine—she's so clever." And he said she was the shallowest woman he knew. You see, he doesn't like poor Flora. He is very fond of Mr. Cleve—the chief clerk of the Tag, Rag, and Bobtail Office, I mean—and he thinks Flora's conduct changed him. He says Mr. Cleve is a very fine man, but not domestic, and he can't bear men not to be domestic. And he thinks it's all Flora's fault.'

'Well, the Cleves have come back, and I hear Mr. Lucius Cleve is coming down,' said Mrs. Primulum. 'Perhaps it will come on again.'

'It may,' assented Mrs. St. Roque, dubiously. 'But poor Flora has gone off very much. She doesn't look at all young now. Mamma says I look years younger, notwithstanding my five children. Big Adrian declared at the last drawing-room—— But I really can't repeat what he said.'

Cecily looked very nice. The only thing against her is her being so *petite*, and so dark. But she looked very nice. I wore blue, and poor Lady Mary's diamonds. She gave them to me just before she died, and Cecily is to have them when I grow old. Big Adrian walked round me like a boy, and asked leave to kiss the Queen of Beauty. I thought it was very sweet of him.'

'So it was,' agreed Mrs. Primulum. 'He's just like my husband. Papa says I'm not a day older than when he married me. He often says so.'

Then the two young matrons laughed, well pleased. There is no satisfaction greater than that which springs from long-standing conjugal admiration.

The group under the tulip-tree had altered. Mr. Hathe and Mr. Homer had gone apart to discuss local trivialities of great importance, and Dr. Wheble and Mr. Primulum had taken the seats vacated by them.

'Times are changing, Mrs. Homer,' remarked the latter, cheerfully. 'What do you think Dr. Wheble did yesterday? He positively got up and went out before noon!'

'I went up to Ule to see the travellers,' explained Wheble. 'My niece and Miss Jermine arrived late the night before. I just saw them at the station and they begged me to come and see them early next day.'

'Well, anything that drags *you* out of bed early is a miracle,' said Mrs. Homer, laughing. 'I shall expect you now to come to Bertha's wedding.'

'How are Miss Jermine and Miss Ovid?' inquired Mrs. Hathe.

'Very well,' replied Wheble. 'They both look uncommonly well. As to Miss Jermine, I'm afraid all the young ladies will be jealous of her. Cecily St. Roque can't approach ~~her~~. Margaret Jermine has height as well as faultless features and an exquisite complexion.'

'Jealous!' cried Mrs. Hathe. 'And why on earth should any good, well-mannered girl be jealous of mere prettiness?'

'But Margaret Jermine is beautiful,' said Wheble. 'And she has pleasant manners, and she is good, and very clever into the bargain. She has only one fault. She is grave, and I like youth to be joyous.'

'Depression of spirits,' remarked Primulum. 'That's a pity. It means weakness somewhere.'

'Pardon me, Primulum, Miss Jermine is weak nowhere,' said Wheble, loftily. 'She is not depressed. If you will examine the meaning of words, you will see that depression and gravity are not synonymous terms.'

Primulum was a little man, happy, active, able, full of self-esteem, of enlightened theories, of good health. He smiled at the elder man's rebuff.

'I know, I know,' he said, soothingly. 'But it's a pity Miss Jermine is grave. Youth should be merry.'

'We have settled to give an afternoon dance the week before Bertha's wedding,' said Mrs. Homer, 'I shall ask Miss Jermine to it, and I hope she'll come. I shall have some young men from town. Cecily St. Roque always monopolises Henry Bartropps and Reginald Dryad, and Isabee Ovid and my girls have all the rest. So I must import partners for the other young ladies. Louie and Bessie don't dance, I think, Mrs. Hathe? I don't suppose Mr. Tally or Mr. Start do either. I do wonder if Mr. Tally will marry again! I shouldn't like one of mine to marry a widower.'

'Why not?' asked Wheble. 'Are you a Positivist, Mrs. Homer? Look at Mrs. St. Roque. She is as happy as the day is long.'

'Mrs. St. Roque is one in a thousand,' said Primulum, warmly. 'She lives for her husband and children, and she has made a perfect stepmother.'

'*What* a flirt she used to be!' observed Mrs. Hathe.

'Yes,' acquiesced Wheble. 'She *was* a flirt, and a very charming one. Like many flirts marriage converted her into a pattern of domesticity. She was one of those people who can't fall in love. One saw that at a glance. She was incapable of a *grande passion*. But she is capable of entire constancy and deep affection. She adores St. Roque. I look upon him as the happiest man in Gladeshire.'

'I never can imagine how my wife and Mrs. St. Roque came to be such friends with Miss Velvetine,' observed Primulum. 'When I ask my wife, she always says she doesn't know, but she's very fond of her, poor thing! It's odd.'

'Pity is akin to love, you know,' said Wheble. 'I suppose they pity the poor creature. I'm sure I do. I should have been a raving lunatic if I'd had to live thirty or

forty years with Mrs. Velvetine. What did you want of me yesterday, Primulum?' he added, drawing the younger man aside.

'I wanted to consult you about Ife.'

'Let Ife go to the devil.'

'Too too too!' remonstrated Primulum. 'The ladies, Wheble, the ladies!'

'The ladies have left off listening. Attend to me, please. You let Ife alone. The sooner he drinks himself to death the sooner his poor wife and the world will be rid of an infernal incumbrance.'

'But I can't let him die, Wheble. Even if I could, Mrs. Ife wouldn't let me.'

'Exactly. You and Mrs. Ife are cruel friends. You can't help your habitual drunkard. Let the poor wretch play his own game and join the majority!'

'My dear Wheble!'

'My dear Primulum, I know it can't be done. Excuse my ill-temper. I'm not a person who can put science into practice, and I can't be patient. Get the law to enable us to shut up madmen like Ife and you'll do some good. Until then——'

He snapped his fingers.

'But seriously, Wheble, can you not help me?' said Primulum.

'No,' returned Wheble. 'There's only one remedy, and that's psychological. Touch the fellow's self-esteem (if he has any left) and you might bring him round. But that must be done by a new element, and I don't see one ready to hand.'

Cecily St. Roque was walking in the woods, as her step-mother had done thirteen years previously, with Regie Dryad. Regie was little changed. He was still beardless and slight. His four-and-thirty years had sat lightly on him. Even his disappointment at Blanche Minimy's marriage had not been of long duration or of great intensity. He had soon come to her, reproachful, but open to reason.

'You know I warned you I *might* marry,' she had said. 'Now let us say no more about it. You are our friend, and I'll find you a nice wife by and by.'

So Regie had become a friend of the St. Roque family. But the nice wife had not yet been found. As a poet the

young man had attained some eminence. He was a favourite in society and ladies liked him. But his juvenile fancy for Blanche Minimy remained for a long time unseconded. Latterly Mrs. St. Roque had thought that he was attracted by her stepdaughter, and she had encouraged the intimacy. She considered that these two would be well matched. Cecily—dark, petite, vivacious—was the very woman for the tall, fair, dreamy poet. They knew each other well. Cecily hardly remembered a time when Regie had not been a frequent visitor at her father's house. Once—when she left school—Regie had begun, with humility, to call her Miss St. Roque. The young lady had opened wide her laughing eyes and tossed her curly head.

'Now, Regie, if you do that I shall go back to school at once,' she had declared. 'There are plenty of Mr. Thises and Sir John Thats and Captain So-and-Sos, to call me Miss St. Roque. I must have one nice old friend to be free with. Isn't it nonsense, mamma?' she had cried. 'Here's this ridiculous Regie wants me to call him Mr. Dryad! Mr. Dryad, forsooth! No, my poet. If you are not Regie to me, you shall be nothing, so make your choice. Let me boast that I call the author of *Pluto* by his Christian name, or begone! I consent to no half measures! Clasp my hand like a man and a brother or make your bow and go!'

'I didn't mean that,' Regie had said, gently. 'I thought you wouldn't like me to take liberties now.'

Whereupon Cecily had cried 'Bosh!' and Mrs. St. Roque had said,

'Oh, my dear Cecily, how can you? My dear pet, don't! Do bear in mind you are all but quite eighteen!'

The little episode had resulted in making Cecily and Regie so friendly that no one but Mrs. St. Roque dreamt of a possible marriage taking place between them. It was difficult, indeed, to prophesy anything as to marriage for Cecily. She was not only intimate with Regie Dryad, but with half a dozen other young men as well. The young Homers adored her, and she smiled upon them. The young Hathes were her slaves, and she smiled upon them too. Above all, Henry Bartropps admired her, and she smiled also upon him. It seemed unlikely that such *bon camaraderie* would end in marriage. Yet, as Mrs. Velvetine had once pointed out to the young stepmother, these *bons camarades* hedged

the fair one in and barred access to more promising suitors. Mrs. St. Roque, however, exercised no coercion, and Cecily went on her way, charming and happy.

'Oh, Regie, I'm so tired of entertaining people,' she said on this afternoon. 'Do come in the wood with me! It will seem as if I were doing my duty and entertaining some one, and I needn't talk to you if I don't like.'

Regie complied willingly and with a smile of amusement. He knew that Cecily would like to talk, and would talk. Her tongue was seldom still. Her loquaciousness, indeed, was a source of joking to her brothers, and they sometimes threatened to sit at her key-hole at night and laid her ten to one that she would talk from midnight until morning.

'Idiots!' Cecily would say frowning. 'Do you call *that* wit, you poor things? I call it buffoonery.'

But Regie seldom said personal things about the glibness of her tongue. He delighted in her gay conversation, and had written a sonnet to her, in which he had immortalised her as

'A maiden full of words that never sting.'

'Oh, what a fatigue entertaining is!' cried the girl, as they entered the wood. 'Why do people entertain in this way? Now, Regie, you are a poet, and you must set a poetic example. When Outwoods is yours, I shall expect you to issue invitations like this:—"The future Poet Laureate will be at home on Midsummer day. That is to say, his house and grounds will be open, and there will be strawberries and cream for all comers, and the band of the Grenadiers will attend. Every one is to do as he likes. No one need talk who would rather be mum. The future Poet Laureate will set an example by reading a book. N.B.—No one is to speak to his friend Miss St. Roque, unless she begins."'

'Then she will speak to every one, and be just as tired as she is to-day,' said Regie.

'I should do nothing of the sort, Regie. Excuse me, Primulum, as Dr. Wheble says, but you are utterly mistaken. I rarely want to talk. It frequently seems to be my duty to speak. But talking is no particular pleasure to me.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Regie.

'Yes, sir. I repeat, talking is no particular pleasure to me—excepting when I talk to old and valued friends. You imagine I like talking, because I talk a good deal to you.

You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I talk to you—and some others—*con amore*.'

'Indeed, you are very kind, Cecily, and I am not ungrateful.'

'Oh, you are not ungrateful!' said she, superciliously. 'Good soul, you are not ungrateful! If I were still a vulgar little girl who learnt naughty words from another vulgar little girl, I should say—My patience! But as I'm a very refined young lady and a poet's friend, I shall merely remark——'

'She paused, smiling.

'What shall you remark?' he asked.

'I shall remark—How very poetic!'

'Now, Cecily, don't be sarcastic. Tell me when you were a vulgar little girl.'

'I was an awfully vulgar little girl when big Adrian married mamma, Regie. Mamma has been the salvation of me. You see, I couldn't bear to vex her. And when she told me not to say, "Oh my!" and "By Jingo!" and "Blow it!" I gave them up. I used to call papa "old cove," and as to poor grandmamma, I used to speak of her in quite a hair-standing-on-end way. Listen, Regie, while I whisper! I used to call her "old mother St. Roque!" When mamma found that out, she looked grave in her pretty way, and talked to me like an angel. So I gave up all my bad ways, and mamma didn't send me to school, as grandmamma predicted she would—not till I was sixteen, and then I went to Paris, and it wasn't a regular school, as you know. Every one says mamma has managed me wonderfully. Do you think so?'

'Well, I always thought you were a very nice little girl, Cecily. But, of course, no one can come in contact with Mrs. St. Roque without being influenced by her.'

'Yes. That's what I think. Now tell me, Regie, is it true that you were in love with mamma before she married my father?'

'Nay, Cecily, I can't answer that.'

'Then you were,' said she, confidently. 'Well, never mind. I think all the better of you for it. If I were a man, I should be in love with mamma now, and I should run away with her. Yes, I should! Big Adrian might swear like a trooper, or cry his eyes out, I'd off with my gentle love, and hide her away in my castle, and——'

'Cecily, you shouldn't!' interrupted Regie. 'What would other people think?'

'Bless your innocent heart, I shouldn't say such a thing to other people!' cried she. 'Don't be such a goose, dear Regie. Don't you see I try to adapt my conversation to my company? You are a poet, and I try to talk poetically to you. Unlike a poet, instead of following my soaring flights with enthusiasm, you begin scolding me, as if you were a clergyman!'

'Scolding you! My dear Cecily, no.'

'Very well, Regie. It seemed like it. But if you didn't mean it, I forgive you. Only never talk to me about other people. You are a friend—a great friend. Other people are bores.'

'Not Henry Bartropps!'

The quick colour dyed her cheeks for an instant.

'No. Henry Bartropps is also a great friend.'

'When is he coming home?'

'I believe he has come home this afternoon. Why do you ask?'

'For no particular reason. Tell me who the other vulgar little girl was.'

'Margaret Jermine.'

'Oh! The lovely Miss Jermine. When is *she* coming home?'

'She came home two days ago, and I went to see her yesterday. I'll just tell you a secret about that, Regie. You think I'm made of brass. Well, I'm not. Off I went as bold as a lion, and got nearly to Ule, when I actually found myself growing shy and nervous, and I fairly turned tail, and went to Bartropps and got Mrs. Minimy to come with me. You see, I hadn't seen Margaret for thirteen years.'

'Well, what is she like?' asked Regie.

'My dear Regie, she is simply lovely. You will admire her beyond thought. She is peerless. I never believed there was such living beauty in the world. She is like one of those exquisite Greek girls that Leighton paints—only with much more in her face—more soul, more intellect, more pathos. The moment I saw her I forgot I'd been shy, and we kissed each other as if we'd only parted the day before. She didn't talk much. Dr. Wheble and Isabee

were there, and of course Miss Ovid, and dear Mrs. Minimy talked for fifty.'

'And how many did you talk for, Cecily?'

'Fie, sir! I wonder at you!' cried she, shaking her finger at him. 'When I am describing a moving scene to you, you interrupt me with a senseless joke. I will tell you no more.'

'Nay, forgive me, Cecily, and proceed.'

'No. You are a monster!'

'Oh, Cecily, *please*.'

'Well—— But you don't look sorry.'

'I am sorry—so sorry. Do relent! Do be appeased!'

'Then don't smile round the corners of your mouth like that! It looks as if you were mocking me. If you can't command your muscles, sir, you ought to grow a moustache!'

'I will, Cecily, if you would like it. But tell me about Miss Jermine.'

'Well, sir, since you allow me to speak, I may tell you that after a time mamma arrived, and she and Margaret just flew into each other's arms, and Margaret said, "Oh, my Minimy-my, my Minimy-my! I thought I should never see you again!" And mamma cried, so did Mrs. Minimy, and Dr. Wheble blew his poor dear nose as if he had half a dozen colds at once. It was exceedingly touching. Margaret looked radiant for a few minutes. But whenever her face is in repose she looks—oh, so sad!'

'She has had a sad young life,' said Regie, gravely.

'We must try and cheer her up now,' said Cecily. 'I'll tell you what, Regie! You shall fall in love with her. Every one says you ought to marry, and Margaret is just the poetic creature who would adorn a poet's home.'

'No. I sha'n't do that,' said the poet.

'You haven't seen her yet, Regie. Wait till then to decide,' cautioned Cecily.

But he shook his head.

'I worship Beauty. But I love Love,' he said, enigmatically.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next day Margaret fulfilled her engagement to lunch at Beaulieu. She came thither alone. Miss Ovid had gone to Gladestreet House. Mrs. St. Roque and Cecily received their guest warmly.

'I would have come to meet you if I'd known you were going to walk,' said the latter. 'We thought you would drive.'

'I wanted to see if I remembered the way, and I love walking through the woods,' said Margaret.

'And did you find your way easily?' asked Mrs. St. Roque.

'I made one mistake,' replied Margaret. 'I took the wrong turn at the mere, and suddenly found myself within sight of Bartrop's. It was very stupid of me. I used to know the woods so well.'

'My dear love, you must be so hot and tired!' cried Mrs. St. Roque. 'Why didn't you go on? Mamma would have been so pleased, and she would have driven you here. I expect her every minute, and Henry is coming too.'

'You haven't seen Henry for ages, have you?' asked Cecily.

'Never since he went to school,' replied Margaret.

'You ~~went~~ know him again,' said Cecily.

'No. I expect not.'

'He is extremely good-looking and nice,' remarked Mrs. St. Roque. 'My husband is very fond of him, and, indeed, we all are. He still calls me his Minimy-my sometimes, Margaret!'

'That is when he wants to coax mamma to do something nice,' said Cecily. 'He is my greatest ally, Margaret. I don't know what I should do without him.'

'You and he always used to be friends,' observed Margaret.

'You and he were much greater friends,' said Cecily. 'But after you were withdrawn from the scenes, he had to put up with me, and now I believe he's very fond of me. Don't frown, mamma! I am one of those people, Margaret, who think it no shame to own to preferences. I like Henry and he likes me, and why shouldn't I say it?'

'Of course there's no real harm in it, my dear pet,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'But it isn't usual. Is it, Margaret?'

'I suppose not,' said Margaret.

'Well, I always tell people what I feel about them,' avowed Cecily. 'I think it's a good plan. Then every one knows where they are with me. Now, I'll tell you what I feel with regard to you, Margaret. I think you are perfectly lovely. I never even imagined any one could be as beautiful as you are. And I think you are sweet and good——'

'Oh, hush, please don't!' interrupted Margaret.

'Well, but that's what I think,' maintained Cecily. 'And I want you to like me and be my friend.'

Then the sound of wheels was heard, and Cecily rushed out into the hall to welcome Mrs. Minimy. The colour which her extravagant compliments had brought into Margaret's cheeks had not faded.

'You mustn't mind what Cecily says, darling,' said Mrs. St. Roque, gently. 'She seems a wild girl. But she is very good really, and most affectionate. She has never given me any trouble. She is as docile as possible. One only just wants to take her in the right way. Oh, mamma, dear, here you are. This is very nice. How do you do, Henry? You naughty boy, why didn't you telegraph? Now I must introduce you to a very old friend. You haven't forgotten your old playfellow, Margaret Jermine, I'm sure?'

'Mr. Bartrop's—Miss Jermine,' said Cecily, laughing.

'Yes, when I got home yesterday, there was Henry,' said Mrs. Minimy to her daughter. 'He travelled down with Mr. Cleve—poor Flora's Lucius. Henry likes him, and he says he's raised the Tag, Rag, and Bobtail quite to importance. Didn't you, my dear? Oh, he's busy with the young ladies! Well, that's as it should be. My dear child, what a charming party we had yesterday. I enjoyed it very much, notwithstanding my hurried exit.'

‘That was Henry’s fault,’ said Mrs. St. Roque.

‘Ah, but he is the dearest fellow in the world,’ said Mrs. Minimy. ‘He has brought me such lovely carving from Switzerland, and bonbons for the chicks from Paris. I always feel so blessed in you and Henry, Blanche. To think I brought you both up, and here you are, quite straight and healthy, and such good complexions, and nothing amiss with either of you, and you married to big Adrian! Now if Henry marries satisfactorily, I shall be ready to die content. I was wondering——’

She lowered her voice.

‘Perhaps,’ said Mrs. St. Roque, softly. ‘It would be very nice. But I daren’t look forward. Matrimonial schemes so often fall through. By the way, what is the truth about Mr. Jermine’s will? Did he really forbid Margaret to marry?’

‘I don’t know,’ replied Mrs. Minimy. ‘I don’t think any one knows, except Dr. Wheble, and he is very secretive.’

‘Flora Velvetine was here this morning,’ said Mrs. St. Roque. ‘I think she wanted me to ask her to stay to lunch. But I thought she would rather spoil the party, so I didn’t. She was very full of Lucius Cleve’s return. She implied that he had come for her sake. I didn’t like to say anything decided. But I’m pretty sure he’ll never look at her again. He’s not the man to do it. Big Adrian says so. However, poor Flora is full of the idea, and she’s going to get a new hat for Mrs. Homer’s garden-party. She says she had a hat with wild roses in it the year she sent Mr. Cleve away, and she’s going to put wild roses in this one.’

‘You don’t mean it!’ cried Mrs. Minimy. ‘Flora in wild roses! She’s too old for wild roses, my dear! Such an innocent flower!—and she looking forty! She ought to wear something sedate. I should advise scarlet geranium, or a tea rose. Wild roses are the youngest flowers in the world. It’s ridiculous for Flora Velvetine to wear them. Oh, here’s Adrian!’

‘And Regie,’ added Mrs. St. Roque.

Then luncheon was announced, and Cecily’s brothers, Edwin and Johnnie, came in, with little Adrian and Theophilus, and the three girls came down stairs with their governess. Margaret sat at St. Roque’s left hand. But he could not induce her to talk much. She was still unused to society, and although her native dignity and her inherent

breeding lent her a certain ease, the unaccustomedness of the occasion made her silent. She talked, however, to Theophilus, who sat next to her, and promised to play to him after lunch. The little boy did not forget.

‘Do come,’ he said, plucking her dress, when the ladies and children were moving across the hall.

‘May I play to the children?’ Margaret asked.

And she went to the piano, and opened it, and the five children crowded round her, and Cecily came too, and Johnnie, who was still young enough to feel more at home with the ladies than with the gentlemen.

‘Sister Cecily can play beautifully,’ said one of the little girls.

‘Nonsense, Gertie!’ cried Cecily. ‘Miss Jermine can play like a Mendelssohn. Can’t you, Margaret?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Margaret.

Then she began to play, and Cecily and her brothers and sisters listened, and Mrs. Minimy and Mrs. St. Roque left off talking, and in a few minutes the gentlemen came into the room, and St. Roque sat down by his wife, silent and pleased, and Henry and Regie and Edwin gathered round the piano. But Margaret played for the children, and sought no admiration. She performed no passages of extraordinary difficulty. She exhibited no eccentric and abnormal skill. And the children understood and were full of glee.

‘Did you like it?’ said Margaret, stopping, and looking into their happy faces.

‘Go on, go on!’ they cried, clapping their hands.

So Margaret began again, and she played one of Handel’s marches, and then modulated into a pathetic Scotch air, and thence into the melody of the ‘*Harmonious Blacksmith*,’ passing into one of Beethoven’s tender *andantes*, and ending in a hymn-tune. Then she began to sing, and the children sang too, and presently Cecily joined in, and then the young men followed her example, and St. Roque rose and drew near and sang also, and his wife came with him, and Mrs. Minimy followed. And they all sang—

‘Oh God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while troubles last,
And our eternal home.’

'Oh, how nice, how nice!' shouted the children.

'Thank you, thank you,' said one and another.

'Now let us come out,' said Cecily, who had no love for the solemn. 'Mamma, will you and Mrs. Minimy come and watch us? We are going to play tennis. You'll soon learn, Margaret. You shall have a good partner. Big Adrian,' she added, saucily, 'you may come if you like, and if little Adrian comes also, we can make up two sets.'

After a time Mrs. Primulum came to call, and found Mrs. St. Roque and her mother established under the tulip-tree.

'How are they playing?' inquired the new-comer. 'Is that Miss Jermine playing with Mr. Dryad? She looks like a Madonna.'

'Yes. That is Margaret,' returned Mrs. St. Roque. 'They are not playing with much spirit. I fancy Regie wanted to play with Cecily. However, she arranged it. I dare say it does very well.'

'I expect papa presently,' observed Mrs. Primulum. 'Then perhaps he'll play, and they'll have to change sides. What a lovely creature Miss Jermine is!'

'And she is such a splendid musician,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'She played to us after lunch in the most ravishing way. I never heard anything like it. Edwin asked her to sing. But she says she doesn't sing. And now I come to think of it, I remember poor Mr. Jermine wouldn't allow her to learn singing. Flora Velvetine always said he thought singing appealed too much to the emotions.'

'Of course it does,' said Mrs. Primulum. 'It was over the piano that papa did his courting. I used to sing a little then. I sing now sometimes. Papa likes to hear me. By the way, Flora is coming to see you this afternoon, Mrs. St. Roque.'

'Why, she was here this morning!' exclaimed Mrs. St. Roque.

'I know,' said Mrs. Primulum. 'But she said she had something special to tell you, and she asked papa if he'd drive her, as she'd had a long walk already. I thought it was rather cool. But papa is so good-natured. He said he'd bring her here, and he told me not to mind.'

'I wish Flora wouldn't do things like that,' said Mrs. St.

Roque, in an annoyed tone. 'It's too bad of her. Isn't it, mamma? Because, if I'd wanted her, I should have asked her. It's only about her new hat, I know. It's just an excuse. She made up her mind she'd come here to-day and see Margaret.'

'Why, you are quite put out! I never saw you so vexed before,' said Mrs. Primulum.

Mrs. St. Roque laughed at herself.

'I am vexed,' she said. 'I'd rather not have had Flora here to-day. However, it doesn't signify.'

'It's all papa's fault, and so I shall tell him,' said Mrs. Primulum. 'He's too kind. And yet he doesn't like Flora at all, poor thing!'

Meantime, the tennis-players were not very lively. Cecily certainly talked a great deal, and made fun of her brothers and rallied her partner. But Henry was less responsive than usual, and the players in the other set were dull. At last Margaret's game broke up. St. Roque said that there were letters he must write before post time. Regie went to look on at the other game. Margaret stole away with the children, and Johnnie accompanied her. Soon afterwards, Miss Velvetine and Primulum made their appearance.

'I've got the very thing I want,' Flora whispered in Mrs. St. Roque's ear. 'Such a lovely wreath!—and not dear either! Eight-and-six—and I made Farmer say eight shillings, because it's the end of the summer. The whole thing will be fifteen shillings. It's a white straw—coarse. I like coarse straw for wild flowers—and trimmed with black lace and this wreath. Won't it be pretty?'

'Very,' said Mrs. St. Roque.

'But where's Margaret Jermine?' continued Flora. 'I made sure I should see her here this afternoon. I was very glad I was obliged to come on that account. Where is she?'

'I don't know,' said Mrs. St. Roque.

'The dear girl has gone somewhere with the chicks,' observed Mrs. Minimy. 'I saw her go towards the wood with them, and Johnnie too. She seems very fond of children. She played to them after lunch in the most enchanting way.'

'I suppose she is as odd as ever,' said Flora.

'I suppose she inherits that from her father,' remarked Primulum.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Primulum, Mr. Jermine was *not* odd,' said Flora. 'I knew him very well. I used to see him constantly, and I never thought him anything but a sensible man. He told me all about his philosophy, and depended entirely on me to make Margaret carry out his plans. That I failed was no fault of mine. Margaret was the most wilful girl in the world, and her temper extremely violent. I had enormous difficulties to contend with. She would interest herself in the forbidden subject. She even took to catechising Mr. Pinington about it. I had to put a stop to that, and I spoke to Mr. Pinington about it when he came to live with us. He was good enough to say he excused it. But it was very unpleasant for me having to apologise for such a thing.'

'But what was the forbidden subject?' asked Primulum.

'Of course it was the subject of Mr. Jermine's philosophy,' replied Flora. 'Margaret had an insatiable curiosity about it—quite an unwomanly curiosity. I must say it was a very awkward moment for me when she began cross-questioning Mr. Pinington about it.'

'Then I wonder you ever reverted to the subject,' said Mrs. St. Roque.

'It was necessary,' said Flora, sighing. 'I couldn't leave Mr. Pinington under a misconception. He might have thought I permitted Margaret to say what she liked.'

'But what on earth could she have said?' demanded Primulum.

'I don't suppose she said anything,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'You fancy things, my dear Flora.'

'Thank you, Blanche,' returned Flora, icily. 'You, of course, know Margaret Jermine well—you, who have not seen her for thirteen years! I, who brought her up, and who was forced to listen to all her unexampled speeches, naturally am a very poor judge of what she said and did!'

'Well, Miss Velvetine, with your opportunities, you ought to have turned her out more to your satisfaction,' said Primulum. 'Why didn't you consult me? If such a beautiful young lady talked to me about love—if I wasn't delirious with joy myself—I should put a blister behind her ear for fear she should be delirious. Every mortal evil has its appropriate drug, you know.'

'Is a blister a drug?' asked Flora, with contempt.

'No, no, I was only joking,' said the doctor, soothingly. 'But how about Mr. Jermine? He must have been a most interesting study. Was he insane?'

'No,' replied Flora, promptly. 'Mr. Jermine was—— But of course I'm not quite at liberty to say all I could about him. You see, my position at Ule was one of great delicacy. Had Mr. Jermine lived a little longer, things would have been very different. Naturally, I felt his death very much. We had been so much to each other, and he had so often and so distinctly opened his whole mind to me. I feel convinced, if he had been able to speak on his death-bed, he would have sent for me. I could have consoled him.'

She looked assertively at her companions. But they did not gainsay her remark.

'Then you ventured to discuss this forbidden subject with Mr. Jermine?' said the doctor, after a moment.

'Mr. Primulum!' ejaculated Flora, reddening.

'Well, but you did, didn't you?' he persisted. 'He opened his whole mind to you, you say, and his whole mind was saturated with love, wasn't it?'

'It was steeled against love,' replied she.

'Against it! Good heavens! then the poor man was undoubtedly insane,' cried Primulum. 'He ought to have been treated for poverty of blood. At least, that's what I should have done.'

'You are so astonishingly clever, Mr. Primulum,' said Flora, curling her lip. 'Do you always prescribe for people without seeing them?'

'Not for you, my dear Miss Velvetine,' replied the doctor, gallantly. 'You know I never miss an opportunity of a personal interview with you.'

'Mamma, are we going to have tea?' asked Cecily, coming up. 'We've had a horrid game. Henry was in bad form, and Regie came and looked on, and I never can play when people are staring at me. Oh, Miss Velvetine, I beg your pardon! How do you do? What have you done with Margaret? Where is she?'

'She has gone off into the woods with Johnnie and the children,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'Somebody must go and fetch her. Edwin, my dear——'

'I'll go,' said Henry.

'Oh, don't trouble,' said Cecily. 'Edwin will go.'

'Of course,' said Edwin.

But Henry went too.

'Why didn't you let me play in the same set with you, Cecily?' asked Regie, softly.

Cecily flung herself into a cane chair. Her pretty lip pouted. There was an expression of discontent in her dark eyes.

'Oh, I don't know,' she said, indifferently.

'Then you needn't have been unkind. If you'd had a reason, I shouldn't have minded.'

'Well, but I had a reason. I remember now. I wanted you to play with Margaret Jermine. I knew she and you would suit each other. You are a poet, and she is a musician, and artists ought to foregather.'

'But Miss Jermine hardly speaks, and you know I can't talk unless I'm talked to.'

'Poor creature!' said Cecily.

'But you know it's a fact.'

'Nonsense! I gave you a first-rate opportunity with the most beautiful woman in Gladeshire, and you simply sulked. I'm ashamed of you, Regie! What's the good of writing verses if you can't talk to an angel? I tell you Margaret Jermine is an angel, sir! She's cut out for you, and I desire that you cultivate her. I don't want you always hanging round me. It's sheer laziness, because I talk and save you trouble. I declare I'll never talk to you any more. You are a disgrace to poets! Margaret is much too good for you.'

'So I think,' said he, humbly.

'And having let her go, you ought to have gone and looked for her,' continued Cecily.

'I think, Henry wished to go,' murmured Regie.

'Wished! He is polite and nice. That's all. He wished nothing of the sort. Now go and get me some tea, if you please. That's the least you can do, after driving away the one person I wanted to talk to.'

Margaret had not gone far. She was seated on a low bench in the wood. The children were clustered round her, and Johnnie was lying on the ground at her feet, looking up into her grave and beautiful face with intense admiration. The approach of Henry and Edwin attracted the volatile

attention of the children, and the little girls came running towards the young men. Johnnie jumped up, and Margaret rose and came to meet the new-comers.

'The mater wants you to come and have some tea,' said Edwin, awkwardly, and envying Johnnie.

'You quite forsook us,' said Henry, turning, and walking by her side.

'I am fond of children, and I like being in the woods,' said Margaret, simply.

'Miss Jermine has been telling us *thousands* of things,' cried Gertie, walking backwards, in front of her elders. 'She's been to Rome, and *lots* of places.'

'You have travelled a good deal,' remarked Henry.

'Yes,' said Margaret. 'For the last three years I have done nothing else, and before that, I had travelled a good deal.'

'That was with Miss Velvetine,' observed Henry.

'Yes.'

'Do you remember that song you once composed about her, and how we used always to call her Velvetine?'

'Yes.'

'Those were nice old days. How long ago is it? Thirteen years, I believe.'

'Yes. Thirteen years.'

'And we have never met since!'

'No.'

She was not communicative. He could not tell whether she were shy, or intentionally distant. But he dared to hope that the latter was not the case, because there was nothing cold or forbidding in her voice or manner.

Edwin and Johnnie walked on her other side. Gertie still danced before them.

'Are you going to walk home?' asked Henry abruptly.

'Yes,' replied Margaret.

'May I escort you?' he asked.

'Thank you,' said she.

'Miss Jermine, may we go on the mere some day?' cried Gertie.

'Yes, dear,' replied Margaret. 'But you mustn't fall in, as I once did when I was a little girl.'

'That was my fault,' observed Henry.

'Oh, no,' said she.

'Yes. It was. I remember it perfectly. I'm afraid I was a horrid little ruffian in those days. I think I remember saying lots of rude things to you. Indeed, I think I remember my want of gallantry only too distinctly.'

'But *when* may we go on the mere?' asked Gertie.

'Whenever Edwin or Johnnie will take you,' replied Margaret.

'But when will that be?' persisted the little girl.

'It shall be on Monday, if your dear mother will let you come on that day, and if Edwin and Johnnie are not engaged,' said Margaret. 'Will you come to lunch?' she added, looking at the two youths. 'Then, after lunch, we can go down to the mere, and go in the boat by turns.'

'Oh, thanks, thanks,' cried the children.

'You don't ask *me* to come,' said Henry, in a low voice.

'I didn't know you would care,' returned Margaret.

'I should like it of all things.'

'Then, please come. I shall be very glad.'

They had reached the lawn.

'Who is the lady in grey?' asked Margaret.

'That!' said Henry. 'That's Velvetine.'

The children ran towards their mother, shouting.

'Miss Jermine has asked us to lunch on Monday, and we are going on the mere,' they cried.

Flora rose, and came tripping across the grass to meet her old pupil.

'How do you do, my dear?' she said. 'I have been most anxious to see you.'

'How do you do, Miss Velvetine?' said Margaret. 'I hope Mrs. Velvetine is well.'

'Yes, thank you,' returned Flora. 'She will be glad to see you when you have time to spare for old friends.'

'She is very kind,' said Margaret.

'I did call,' proceeded Flora. 'But they told me you were engaged. I understand you were holding quite a drawing-room of acquaintances. I was disposed to be hurt. But I reflected that the world is always ungrateful.'

'Come and sit by me and have some tea, Margaret,' cried Cecily. 'Leave her alone, Miss Velvetine. You can talk to her another time. What do these little scaramouches mean, Margaret? Are you really going to have the whole tribe to lunch?'

'Yes, all of them,' said Margaret. 'I want you to bring them, Cecily. Please, dear Mrs. St. Roque, may all the children come to lunch with me on Monday? Edwin and Johnnie say they will come too, and take them on the mere——'

She hesitated a moment.

'And Mr. Bartropps says he will come and take care of every one,' she added.

So the manner of address between the two old playfellows was settled.

'Miss Jermine is good enough to trust me, although I once nearly drowned her in the mere,' said Henry.

'But you can't have *all* the children,' expostulated Mrs. St. Roque. 'My dear pet, you don't know what you are undertaking! Have the boys one day, and the little girls another.'

'But I want them all,' reiterated Margaret, stroking Gertie's eager face.

'I never knew such spoilt children or such a foolish mother,' observed Flora to Mrs. Primulum. 'I should send Gertie to bed, if she were my child.'

'But, my dearest love,' remonstrated Mrs. St. Roque.

'Yes; all,' repeated Margaret. '*Please*, my Minimy-my,' she added.

'Please, my Minimy-my,' echoed Henry. 'I will take care of them.'

'Of course she gives in,' said Flora. 'I call it a disgusting exhibition. A woman of Blanche's age—and married too!—to let herself be cajoled in that way by a young man like Henry Bartropps! I can't think how Mr. St. Roque can allow it. But he's quite foolish about Blanche. He just sits there, grinning for all the world like an idiot!'

'My dear Miss Velvetine, don't say that except among friends,' said Primulum, warningly. 'People would laugh at you. Why, Mr. St. Roque is so esteemed that they say he's certain to be in the Cabinet when his party takes office.'

Flora turned away petulantly. Regie Dryad was at her elbow. He was looking disconsolately at Cecily. Cecily had sent him away to get her a biscuit, and when he had returned, she was inaccessible. Margaret was on one side of her, and Henry on the other.

'I beg your pardon. Did you speak?' asked Regie.

'I see you are looking at Margaret Jermine,' said Flora. 'She is an eccentric.'

'Is she?' said the poet.

'She is dreadfully spoilt,' continued Flora. 'I knew her father well, and he wished her to be tamed. His untimely death ruined her.'

'That's a pity,' said Regie, vaguely.

He was not listening.

'She ought to have had a very different duenna,' continued Flora. 'Miss Ovid is a good creature. But she hasn't the faintest notion of how to manage girls.'

'How to manage girls!' echoed Regie.

'Yes. All girls want managing. Somebody should have the upper hand.'

'There I disagree,' said Regie, suddenly arousing himself. 'I think nobody should manage anybody. Girls are as capable of managing themselves as other people. I particularly dislike management. Excuse me. I think Mrs. Minimy is beckoning to me.'

He went away, and Flora got up and moved to Margaret's side. Henry immediately offered her his seat. Cecily also rose.

'I want to show you something, Henry,' she said.

'I have driven them away, and I ought to apologise,' said Flora, with an assumption of geniality. 'But I can't be very sorry, my dear Margaret. I really wanted to see you. What do you think of Cecily? I am afraid she'll never be a nice girl. Of course, Blanche has done her best to ruin her. She wanted a tight hand, and poor dear Blanche has just let her drift. She is a sad flirt. You see, she's gone off with Henry Bartropps now. She said she had something to show him. A *more rise!*'

'She is very, very pretty,' said Margaret.

'Do you think so?' objected Flora. 'She is so short, and such a decided tendency to plumpness! She will be fat at thirty.'

Margaret made no rejoinder, and, after a moment, Flora went on.

'There are literally no nice people now in Gladeshire,' she said. 'I advise you to be a little careful how you rush into friendships. I was rather surprised to see you so intimate

with Blanche St. Roque and Cecily. Of course it is not my business to interfere. I have been so completely shunted. But I think I owe it to your dear father's memory to remind you that I was his greatest intimate, and that no one knows as well as I do how he wished you to conduct yourself. I could have told you all he wished, if Dr. Wheble had not forbidden you to see me,' she concluded.

'Pardon me, Miss Velvetine, Dr. Wheble did not forbid me to see you,' said Margaret, flushing. 'He could not forbid me to do anything. I was of age. *Everything* I did was my own doing.'

'Oh, indeed, if I am mistaken, I apologise,' said Flora, 'But it looked so *very* odd your engaging Aurelia Ovid as your companion.'

Again Margaret flushed hotly. But she refrained from speaking.

'As I was saying, no one knows your poor dear father's mind as well as I do,' continued Flora. 'I shall be very glad to discuss his philosophy with you, Margaret, and to give you such instructions about your behaviour as he would approve.'

'You are very kind,' returned Margaret. 'I thank you for your offer. But I do not need an interpreter of my father's philosophy. His MS. treatise is in my possession, and it is written so simply that I have no difficulty in understanding it.'

Flora stared, greatly astonished.

'Margaret Jermine is just the little hot-tempered wretch she always was,' she told her mother in the evening. 'She got scarlet with rage and almost slapped me in the face. I do think I am entitled to some consideration, after all that passed between Mr. Jermine and myself. The idea of that pert little monkey telling me she didn't need an interpreter of her father's treatise! I could hardly sit still. I as nearly as possible said, "My good girl, another six months and I should have been your stepmother!"'

But Flora commanded herself, and did not speak thus.

'So you don't like talking of your father!' she said. 'Well, I have no wish to be intrusive. But if you should ever be at a loss to know what to do, I shall be very happy to give you my advice. I don't bear malice. You were a regular Topsy in your childhood, and I had untold trouble

with you, and I must say your politeness to me was very marked at the time of your father's death. But I should be willing to pass over all that, if you were in difficulties. At any time, you can command my counsel. I knew *exactly* what your father wished.'

'You are very kind,' repeated Margaret. 'But I have a letter, which my father wrote to me shortly before his death, and which contains all the instructions I am likely to need.'

'I hope it contains a recommendation to ask Henry Bartropps to lunch,' said Flora, spitefully. 'I was astonished to hear you'd asked him. It looked most peculiar—*most* peculiar. Of course, I don't wish to meddle, notwithstanding my close relations with your father. But you must excuse me, Margaret, if I am unable to resist speaking rather plainly.'

'You are very kind,' said Margaret once more. 'I am afraid I was a very troublesome little girl, Miss Velvetine. But please forget that, and forgive me. I am hoping to call upon you and Mrs. Velvetine early next week. Now I think I ought be going home.'

Then she rose, and went to bid adieu to Mrs. St. Roqué.

'There is Miss Jermine shaking hands,' said Henry to Cecily. 'I said I would walk back with her.'

'Oh, I was going to propose another set,' cried Cecily.

'Well, why not?' returned Henry. 'Primulum will play, I'm sure.'

But Cecily pouted.

'No. I sha'n't play,' she said, decidedly. 'If you are going home with Margaret, I shall take a walk with Regie.'

She fixed her eyes upon Henry as she spoke. But he evinced no sign of jealousy. He went up to Margaret, and told her he was at her service.

'Then you will let them all come on Monday, my Minimy-my?' Margaret was saying. 'Cecily, you will come, won't you? Thank you, Mr. Bartropps. I am ready now.'

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Margaret and Henry had crossed the sunny lawn and disappeared into the woods, and while the children, who had accompanied them through the garden, were scampering back, the thoughts of more than one of their elders jumped to a possible conclusion.

'There goes a very handsome couple,' remarked Primulum.

'Indeed, yes,' assented Mrs. St. Roque.

'There goes a thorough-going flirt,' said Flora. 'I don't know what Margaret Jermine may have developed into since all her poor father's plans for her were interfered with. But Henry Bartropps is a sad flirt. Isn't he, Cecily?' she added, with spite.

'A flirt!' exclaimed Mrs. Minimy, overhearing. 'Henry isn't a flirt, Flora. Surely he is not considered a flirt?' she said, appealing to the others.

'Oh dear no!' cried Mrs. St. Roque. 'I don't call Henry a flirt. Not a bit of it! Do you, Cecily? We've never looked upon him as a flirt, have we?'

But for once Cecily was cross.

'I don't know,' she said, petulantly. 'I can't offer an opinion. One can't judge when one knows a person very well.'

She tapped her foot impatiently with her racquet.

'Poor Cecily!' said Flora. 'It's hard upon you, I will say. You should grow, my dear. You see Henry admires maypoles.'

'If I thought Henry flirted, I should speak to him gravely,' announced Mrs. Minimy. 'I couldn't tolerate real flirting. For every reason Henry oughtn't to flirt. His position in the county forbids it. Indeed I couldn't sanction his trifling

with any one. You don't really think he flirts, do you?' she asked, comprehensively.

'No,' replied St. Roque, who had finished his letters and rejoined the party in the garden. 'At least, I never observed it.'

'But you are not what one calls an observant man, Adrian,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'You observe Blanche. You don't observe any one else. Why, you don't even observe Edwin! You never saw his sore throat till Mr. Primulum said he had fears about diphtheria. You haven't a scrutinising eye. Blanche, my dear, do *you* think Henry is a flirt?'

'No, mamma, I don't,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'I've seen a great deal of Henry, and I never thought he flirted. We never thought so, did we, Cecily?'

'Oh, don't ask Cecily, pray!' interposed Flora. 'She's in a dreadful temper over it already. I'm sorry for her. It isn't pleasant to be cut out by a gawky girl, just because she's rich.'

'No one could ever cut out Miss St. Roque,' remarked Primulum. 'Even Miss Jermine couldn't, and she is the loveliest woman I have ever seen—except my wife,' he added, smiling.

Flora laughed ironically.

'I am sure Mrs. Primulum and Cecily are much obliged to you for your championship,' she said. 'As to Margaret Jermine, I call her just passable—nothing more. She is too pale and too tall, and her expression is almost disagreeable. I think her poor father would have been dreadfully disappointed.'

'I dare say he would, seeing he meant her to grow up a cynic and a misanthrope,' said St. Roque.

'She certainly isn't a misanthrope,' said Flora, with ill-nature. 'I was quite ashamed of the way she took possession of Henry. As her father's old friend, I ventured on an expostulation. She wasn't pleased. I saw that at a glance. She looked quite furious. She as good as told me to mind my own business. I was a good deal hurt by her manner. I brought her up, and had endless trouble with her when she was a regular tomboy. But of course a girl of her disposition would never be grateful.'

'My dear Miss Velvetine, your interest in Miss Jermine does you great credit,' said Primulum. 'But you must

remember she is no longer a little girl. She must be allowed to choose her own mentor.'

'Thank you, Mr. Primulum,' said Flora. 'As usual, you are most kind. But when I want your advice, I will ask for it.'

'Papa, oughtn't we to be getting home?' interrupted Mrs. Primulum. 'Flora, if you are ready, I think we ought to be saying good-bye.'

'But, my dear Flora, I don't see that Margaret has a disagreeable expression,' said Mrs. Minimy, knitting her placid brows. 'I think she has a remarkably sweet face. There may be a species of sadness in it—a kind of pathos. But then she is an orphan, and I dare say she feels the loneliness of her position. Indeed, Dr. Wheble owned as much. He said that hers was a desolate personality. I am almost sure those were the words he used. And naturally, he knows.'

'Oh, of course,' cried Flora. 'Oh dear yes! We all know Dr. Wheble knows. However, I suppose Margaret Jermine's personality won't be desolate much longer. What will become of the Ovids, I wonder?'

'You mean, whom will they marry?' said Primulum, argumentatively. 'Well, I can suggest a *parti* for one of them. There's a tremendous eligible just down from town—the chief clerk of the 'Tag, Rag, and Bobtail'—Mr. Lucius Cleve. He's bound to marry some one. Yes, Miss Velvetine, I shouldn't wonder——'

'I have said good-bye, papa,' said Mrs. Primulum, pressing his arm.

'My dear, why do you pinch me?' asked the doctor, looking at her gravely. 'I was just going to tell Miss Velvetine——'

'Come, my dear, come!' cried Mrs. Primulum. 'Flora, are you ready?'

'I never saw any one so ill-natured as Flora,' said Mrs. Minimy, looking after the departing guests. 'She really deserves Mr. Primulum's teasing. Now, my darling Blanche, let us be comfortable for five minutes before Adrian comes back. Tell me. Shall I encourage Henry's attentions to Margaret? It strikes me he admires her already. Is it a thing to be promoted, do you think?'

'I should think so, certainly,' replied Mrs. St. Roque.

'Ule and Bartropps abut. The Jermine and the Bartroppses used to be great friends. Henry is charming, and good-looking and clever, and Margaret is lovely and sweet and very accomplished. Yes. I thought at once what a match it would be! But we'll just ask big Adrian.'

'You see, I shouldn't like to do anything that the county might take amiss,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'Henry is an influential person, and of course any influence I may have as to his marrying, I hold—in a sort of way—as a responsibility to the county. I shouldn't like to help on a marriage that the county families would feel uncomfortable about. Still, I see nothing against Margaret. She has a beautiful complexion, and a good figure, and her teeth are nice. Her appearance is admirable. And as to Henry, every one admits that he is the picture of an English gentleman. There's only one thing that concerns me about dear Margaret.'

'And what is that, mamma dear?' asked Mrs. St. Roque.

'The *aberration*, my dear love,' murmured Mrs. Minimy. 'Dr. Wheble won't hear of it. He says poor Mr. Jermine wasn't insane. But really I hardly know. Margaret is just what she should be. But there was a distinct eccentricity about her father, and if there should be the least taint of mental disease in the dear girl, I should never cease to blame myself. I couldn't bear the least symptom of insanity to be brought into the Bartropps family through my encouragement.'

'Well, let us ask big Adrian,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'Nobody ever spoke of Mr. Jermine as a madman. They say he never recovered the shock of his wife's death—that is all.'

Then her husband returned from seeing off the Primulums and Flora, and Mrs. St. Roque laid the case before him.

'Mamma wants to know whether she would be justified in encouraging any feeling Henry might have for Margaret,' she concluded.

'Oh, undoubtedly! The very best thing in the world,' said St. Roque, cheerfully. 'I advise you to use your best endeavours to bring it about, Mrs. Minimy.'

'Then you don't think seriously of Mr. Jermine's idiosyncrasy?' said Mrs. Minimy. 'It would break my heart to see the health of the Bartroppses impaired. Henry is so exactly what he should be.'

'Oh, you mustn't trouble about that,' said St. Roque. 'It has long been my opinion that if marriages were only contracted between two families who could both produce a clean bill of physical and mental health, there would scarcely be twenty marriages in a century, and the political consequences—not to speak of the moral consequences—would be eminently disastrous. I really don't know whether poor Jermine was out of his mind or not. But if he was, it was a clear case of accidental insanity, and not the least likely to prove hereditary.'

'You see what Adrian thinks,' said Mrs. St. Roque, laying her hand on her husband's knee. 'Now be happy, mamma dear.'

St. Roque pressed his wife's fingers.

'After all, Henry will do as he likes,' he said. 'No discouragement would have kept me from Blanche.'

Meanwhile, the two young people about whom so much conversation circulated, walked through the woodland paths that they had frequented in their childhood, and renewed their old acquaintance.

'You are fond of children?' observed the young man, when they had parted from the little St. Roques.

'Yes. I am very fond of children,' replied Margaret. 'But beyond my liking for them, I feel an intense compassion for them. Their wills and desires are so strong, and their powers so small. I cannot bear them to be unhappy and disappointed. I was not a happy child myself, and it seems to me that I can never do enough to make other children happier than I was. Besides, I have other reasons.'

'I think you are very kind,' said Henry. 'I was happy enough as a boy. But if I had not been, I don't think it would have occurred to me that that was a reason for making the youngsters of the present happy.'

Margaret made no reply. But her answer to his question had proved that she was not wholly inaccessible, and Henry did not despair of winning her confidence.

'I dare say seeing Miss Velvetine reminds you of your childhood,' he remarked.

'Yes,' assented Margaret.

'Miss Velvetine is much the same, only a little more so,' said Henry, laughing. 'She is a little sharper and a little sourer, and a little more ill-natured, and a good deal plainer.'

'She used to be pretty,' said Margaret.

'Well, I suppose so. I never liked her.'

Margaret refrained from speaking.

'Did you?' he asked.

'I bear her no grudge,' said Margaret.

'But you don't like her? You never did like her?' persisted Henry.

'She certainly gave me no pleasure and some pain,' said Margaret.

'What queer days those were!' remarked he. 'Do you remember how we used to scramble about?'

'Yes. I was always in disgrace for tearing my frocks, and Mrs. Minimy groaned because I was sunburnt.'

'But they were very nice,' said Henry.

Margaret sighed.

'You don't agree,' he added. 'I was a rough boy. I'm afraid I bullied you.'

'No. I think you did me good.'

'Did you good! How?'

She smiled.

'The last time I saw you—when you said good-bye before you went to Eton—you gave me a great deal of good advice about behaving properly to Miss Velvetine and the servants, and you told me to be a lady when you came back again.'

'Did I? What unutterable impertinence!'

'Not at all. It was very good for me, and I tried to do as you said.'

'But how could I say such a thing?' he asked, looking at her.

'Very easily. I was a rough, untidy little girl.'

'I'm so sorry. I wish I hadn't.'

'Oh, please don't say that. What can it matter now? It was so long ago—thirteen years. Besides, I assure you it did me good.'

'But it made you unhappy. I remember now that you cried.'

'Yes. But I was always unhappy, and I cried at the slightest provocation.'

'But I made you cry unnecessarily. I was a brute.'

'No, no.'

'I was. I ought to have been more manly. I was too old to be so bearish. I was selfish and cruel——'

'All children are selfish and cruel, more or less,' said she. 'I have cultivated children during the last few years. They are like young nations. They don't bear and forbear, and they have no polish. They fight, and each one tries to get the upper hand. Watching children is like reading a miniature history. I like to see their characters gradually forming. Children are my greatest pleasures.'

'Are they?' said Henry. 'I don't notice children much. Excepting Mrs. St. Roque's children. Of course I am fond of them.'

'They are very nice children, and I hope I shall see a great deal of them,' said Margaret. 'What other children are there in Gladeshire?'

'Oh, I don't know. There are lots.'

'I must get to know them all.'

'What for?' he inquired.

'Because I like them, and I wish to give them pleasure. Besides——'

'Besides what?'

'I don't know that I wish to say.'

'Why? Is it a secret?'

'No. I suppose you have heard of my father's philosophy?'

'Yes.'

'Well, he wished me to find my pleasures in books, in music, in scenery. I—perhaps wrongly—have added children to his list.'

'Why children? Why not grown-up people?'

She hesitated.

'Friendship for children is not quite the same thing as friendship for grown-up people,' she said, after a moment. 'I think my father would have admitted that. For me, human companionship is essential. My father had the strength of character which can endure loneliness. I have not. Therefore I cultivate children.'

'They are to be envied,' said he.

'Do you think so? Indeed they give me more than I give them.'

'But you don't mean to give yourself *solely* to the children of Gladeshire?' said Henry.

'No. I hope to be acquainted with all my neighbours.'

'I am your nearest neighbour,' said he.

'And the St. Roques,' added she. 'How pretty Cecily is!'

'Yes,' he acquiesced.

'And charming.'

'Oh yes. She is very amusing.'

'And Mrs. St. Roque is as sweet as ever.'

'Yes. I am glad you haven't forgotten our old name for her.'

'I could never forget anything about her,' said Margaret. 'She was always lovely and always kind. Mrs. Minimy was always kind too.'

'Mrs. Minimy proposed forsaking me when I came of age,' said Henry. 'But of course I begged her to remain. She has been like a mother to me.'

'I also have been fortunate,' said Margaret. 'Miss Ovid is very, very good to me. I sometimes wonder how I lived without her.'

'Then you don't refuse *all* friendship with grown-up people?' said Henry.

'I cannot quite,' she replied. 'Besides, I believe that my father was mistaken.'

'Then why do you follow his maxims at all?' cried Henry, impulsively.

'Because——' she began.

Then she paused. A sudden colour dyed her cheeks.

'It is a long because,' she said, sighing.

'Not too long for me to hear.'

'Nay. It would bore you.'

'Nay. It would interest me.'

'But I tell you too much,' said she, ingenuously.

'That would be impossible.'

'I think my father was mistaken,' she said, slowly. 'I have read his treatise, and I have talked it over with Dr. Wheble. Dr. Wheble is of opinion that my poor father never recovered the shock of my mother's death, and that, in some inscrutable way, this shock permanently affected his brain. His reasoning faculty remained intact. But his power of formulating a correct premiss was taken from him. He reasoned well. But as he started from a false basis, he arrived at an untrue conclusion. I see this clearly. I feel that he was in error when he shut himself up, and when he debarred me from all society. I feel that his wish that I should merely know people, without intimacy or friendship, was erroneous likewise, and I cannot comply with it entirely.'

I cannot lead a totally unsocial life. But I can sacrifice my own desire for friends,—for equal companionship, and I can content myself principally with the unequal companionship of children.'

She spoke with gentle decision. For the moment, Henry did not gainsay her. But in his heart he made an instant vow that he would use every effort to overturn her scruples, and that he would strive mightily that she should not content herself with the unequal companionship of children.

'I think you are almost too conscientious,' he said.

'I loved my father,' she returned, simply. 'I can do nothing to prove my love for him but respect his last wishes.'

'But you may find it hard.'

'Possibly. I cannot say. I am very happy with Miss Ovid. Besides, childhood is eternal. I shall never lack companions. One generation of children treads on the heels of the last and is quickly overtaken by the next.'

'But it seems unnatural,' argued Henry.

'Does it? My ambition is to become a universal Aunt Margaret,' said she, smiling slightly.

Henry thought that this ambition was absurd. Men—as a rule—love their own children only. There is nothing in their natures analogous to the subjective motherhood in women.

'Perhaps you will think differently some day,' he said, quietly.

They had reached the mere, and were following the path which skirted its margin. In the midst of the placid waters lay the lonely islet where the bodies of Margaret's parents reposed.

'That is where I shall lie some day,' said Margaret, in a low voice. 'Then the Jermine's will have come to an end.'

'You shouldn't talk of such things,' said Henry. 'It is unsuitable. What has death to do with us?'

'My mother was only my age when she died,' said Margaret.

'I know. But why should you think of such melancholy things?'

'It is not a melancholy thing. I should not like life, if it were never to end.'

‘I hate to think of death,’ said Henry, frankly. ‘I love to live.’

‘So do I—for the present.’

‘With your child-companions?’

‘Yes. I shall like filling their lives with pleasure.’

‘And will they suffice you?’

‘I cannot say.’

‘Will you suffice *them*?’

‘No. Certainly not. That would be far from my wish. I shall hope to promote life-long intimacies and friendships among my boys and girls.’

‘Marriages, you mean?’

‘Yes. And other friendships.’

‘And yet you won’t try and cement friendships for yourself?’

She shook her head.

‘But why? If such things are bad for you, they must be bad—for your boys and girls.’

‘No. They will not be bound by a father’s last wish.’

‘Neither will you be always.’

‘Indeed I think I shall be—always.’

‘That is a matter of opinion, and opinions change.’

‘No. It is a matter of principle, and principles remain,’ she said, with a sad emphasis.

Then they saw Miss Ovid coming to meet them, and, after a few minutes, Henry bade the ladies good-bye and went home.

He was filled with new and delightful sensations. In all his life, no woman had ever pleased him as Margaret pleased him now. He thought that she was beautiful, loveable, beyond all women charming. The alternations of her reserve and of her extreme candour seemed to him to be enchanting. When she held herself aloof, her reticence made him long to be possessed of her confidence. When she became frank, her frankness bewitched him. Her opposition to the usual views of life attracted him. She was unlike other people. He knew many girls,—girls whose gaiety and prettiness was pleasing,—girls whose fun was exhilarating,—girls whose wit was dazzling. But he had never before met with a woman who was grave almost to solemnity, and unusual almost to eccentricity, and who yet possessed an inexplicable attractiveness. Was it her beauty

that allured him? He could not tell. But he had seen many beautiful women, and hitherto no loveliness had fascinated him. Now he was completely captivated. In one moment he loved.

He had never thought distinctly of love. He had talked about love, as other young men talk about it. But he was not poetical or imaginative, and he had no intuitive knowledge. He had intended to marry. He conceived that he ought to marry—that Bartropps of Bartropps would but fulfil a social duty in endeavouring to perpetuate his race. He had always meant to marry—some day. He had never dreamed, however, of climbing *the pair of stairs to marriage* which Oliver and Celia climbed in the sweet Shakespearian days. Truth to tell, he had been somewhat wont to ridicule such nonsensical ideas as love at first sight. He prided himself on being practical. He believed in love. That is to say, he believed in the power and magnitude of the affections. But hitherto he had despised passion, believing that only weak and ill-governed minds gave way to it. He liked Benedick. But he thought that Sydney Carton was rather a fool, and Romeo beneath contempt.

It bewildered him for the moment when he found that he himself had fallen desperately in love. But he owned the fact at once, and characteristically. He did not wait to discover gradually that he loved the queenly woman who had been his little playmate in days of yore. He thought about Margaret all the evening, and then he declared to himself that he loved her, and he resolved that he would woo her and win her. Then he went to bed and slept well. It never occurred to him that he might fail. He had never been thwarted in his life. He had always had his own way. He had always done what he liked. Fortune had humoured him. People had always liked to please him. It was fortunate for himself that he was naturally amiable and affectionate, and that in his early youth he had been docile. It was fortunate, moreover, that he had been endowed with an extraordinary common sense and common worldliness. He had been very young when he had told Margaret that it was caddish to play tricks on Velvetine. But he had retained the sentiment, and he had acted upon it. At school and at college he had held the same opinion. It was bad form, he had considered, to be insubordinate, and to be

guilty of stupid boyishnesses. It was beneath the dignity of a gentleman, he had maintained, to get into disgrace. Other men might laugh at him. He cared not a jot for that. He was strong. What he chose to do, he did. And he invariably chose to do right.

'I never knew such a good, dear fellow as Henry,' Mrs. Minimy would say. 'He has never given me the least anxiety, except when he had the measles, and I was so dreadfully afraid his complexion would suffer. Some people's complexions thicken after the measles. I should have been cut to the heart if Henry had got out of his bed mutilated. But Mr. Primulum was most attentive, and the dear boy is everything I could wish.'

Henry determined to marry Margaret, and he saw no insuperable stumbling-blocks in his way. There might be, indeed, certain difficulties. Her vague hints caused him to surmise that her dead father had discountenanced the idea of her marrying. She had evidently mapped out a life for herself, and that life was a life of spinsterhood. But he did not suppose that this obstacle was insurmountable. He did not imagine that it might prove irresistible. Surely he would eventually be able to dispel his lady's scruples, and he felt that he would only love her more for not yielding easily. He did not want his wife to be weak. Margaret was attractive because she was unlike other women. Her womanliness was abundant. But she was independent. And it seemed to Henry that the greatest happiness of a strong man's life must come to him when a strong woman consented to submit her strength to his.

Margaret, on the contrary, felt vexed that she had been so open with her old companion.

'I am afraid I said some foolish things to Henry Bartropps this afternoon,' she told Miss Ovid. 'I am never confidential with any one but you, *Carissima*. But somehow, when I began talking to Henry, I went on. It seemed so natural—like the old days, when we were children and I used to tell him everything. I think, perhaps, I was silly.'

'But what did you say to him, dear?' asked Miss Ovid.

'Oh, nothing much. Only that I meant to devote myself to the children. He didn't seem to like that.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know.'

Then there was a short silence. Margaret broke it.

'I almost wish Henry didn't live so near,' she said. 'I wished not to be intimate with any one. But I could hardly refuse when he offered to walk home with me. You see, he is such an old friend. Though I've told you so often, *Carissima*, you have no idea what we were to each other when we were children. It is impossible to treat him like a stranger. Then he almost asked himself to lunch. I couldn't refuse. I couldn't say I shouldn't be glad to see him. Could I?'

'No, dear.'

'It will be very difficult, *Carissima*. But I am determined to keep my resolution.'

Miss Ovid sighed.

'We will not open that discussion now,' she said. 'You know it distresses me. I should like you to feel like other girls. I should like you to marry. I should like to see you a happy wife——'

'O *Carissima*, don't! You know it cannot be.'

There was pain in Margaret's voice. But the two ladies were sitting in the twilight, and Miss Ovid could not see her companion's face.

'I think I almost wish people knew,' Margaret went on, after a moment's pause. 'You see, people might—I mean——'

'You mean, you think somebody might love you, and—and wish to combat your resolve.'

Margaret made a sound of assent.

'My own dear girl, that is certain to happen. Are you quite, quite sure that you would never respond?'

'I am quite sure that I shall never let myself respond, *Carissima*.'

Miss Ovid sighed again.

'Margaret, I would rather have lost my right hand than that you should have had that letter,' she said.

'But, *Carissima*, since I have had it!'

'Your opinions about it may change.'

'That is what Henry said, and I told him it was not a matter of opinion, but of principle.'

'Then you told Henry about your father's letter?'

'I told him my father had left me his final instructions. Yes. I told him that. I told you I had talked very foolishly to him. O *Carissima*, I almost wish we hadn't come home! When we were travelling, we had only to be polite. Here I foresee that we shall have to be friendly.'

Again Miss Ovid only answered with a sigh. It was no use wasting words over this matter. She had already exhausted every possible argument to induce Margaret not to consider herself bound by her father's letter.

'Perhaps Henry Bartropps will succeed where I have failed,' she thought, perceiving how readily Margaret had fallen into the long-disused habit of treating her old playmate with confidence, and perceiving also that the girl was troubled and that unusual thoughts were in her heart.

But Margaret thought otherwise.

'I will *not* be intimate with Henry,' she said to herself.

Accordingly, when he came to luncheon the following Monday, she treated him distantly. Cecily had not come. She had sent a message to say she would walk over in the afternoon. Margaret was surrounded by the little St. Roques.

'Do go on, Aunt Margaret,' cried Gertie, after Margaret had shaken hands with Henry.

'Hush, dear!' said Margaret, gently. 'Little girls mustn't be exacting. How is Mrs. Minimy, Mr. Bartropps?' she asked, with formality.

'She is quite well, thank you. She sent her love to you,' he replied.

He felt annoyed. The children clustering round Margaret were an offence to him.

'You have spoilt all, Henry,' said Gertie, reproachfully. 'Aunt Margaret was telling us the *loveliest* story.'

'Why do you call Miss Jermine Aunt Margaret?' asked Henry.

'She told us to,' replied the little girl.

Then they went into the dining-room, and still the children sat on either side of Margaret. After luncheon it was the same. Two children claimed Margaret's hands as they walked to the mere. All the children chattered, and Margaret did not check them. True, she did not suffer Henry to be silent. But she drew him into conversation, not with herself, but with the little ones.

'How deep is the mere?' asked little Adrian.

'I don't know,' replied Margaret. 'Ask Mr. Bartropps.'

'How deep is the mere?' asked the boy again, looking at Henry.

'Deep enough to drown you,' replied Henry. 'I don't

know precisely. I dare say dear old Pin knows,' he added, looking at Margaret.

'I dare say,' returned she. 'Adrian, remember to ask Mr. Pinington. What is it, Theophilus?'

'*May* I go in the boat at *once*, Aunt Margaret?' implored Adrian's younger brother.

'I don't know. Edwin and Mr. Bartropps will settle.'

'And *may* we go to the island, Aunt Margaret?' entreated Gertie.

'If your brothers and Mr. Bartropps say yes. They are going to row you. You must ask them.'

'You are coming too, I hope, Miss Jermine?' said Henry.

'No, thank you. I am going to stay on the bank with the remainder of the flock. There isn't room in the boat for all at once. I thought you would take charge of each boat-load. I don't want there to be an accident.'

'But Miss Ovid is here,' persisted Henry. 'Won't she take care of the children who are left behind?'

'I would rather not come,' said Margaret. 'The children want to go on the island, and I don't care to go there with them. I thought you would take Gertie and Theophilus there first, and leave them with Edwin or Johnnie and come back for the other three. Then bring back Theophilus and Gertie, and fetch the others. Will that do?'

In Henry's estimation her plan did not do at all. But he made no further demur. It was evidently her desire to-day to be remote, and he yielded to her humour, and plied backwards and forwards over the lake, according to her directions. But when he had landed all the children, he evaded Edwin and Johnnie, and rowed back to the mainland by himself. Miss Ovid had gone back to the house to await the coming of Cecily, and Margaret was alone.

'Is anything the matter?' she called out, as the boat neared the shore.

'No,' returned Henry.

Then the boat shot in among the rushes, and he sprang to land.

'The children wanted to stay a few minutes, so I left them,' he said. 'Edwin and Johnnie are there.'

'You have been very kind,' said Margaret. 'Thank you.'

'May I sit down for a few minutes?' he asked.

'Yes. But you will fetch the children soon?'

'I will go back whenever you tell me,' he said.

If Margaret had known him better, she would have marvelled at his meekness. It was Henry's wont to lead. But she did not know him well, and she had not yet learnt that, in spite of their apparent gallantry, most men constrain most women to give way.

'It is pleasant here,' she observed. 'I love this calm, small lake, with its water-lilies. It is always here and always untroubled—as if the world had gone on and forgotten it and left it to an everlasting childhood.'

'That everlasting childhood is a pet theme of yours,' said Henry. 'I see you have put one of your schemes in execution already. You have given those children leave to call you aunt.'

'Yes,' she returned. 'I wished it so much.'

'I suppose you know a great deal about children,' said he.

'I have met a good many, and I have always made friends with them,' she rejoined. 'I like them and I think I understand them. I remember my own childish days vividly, and in that remembrance I learn what other children think and feel.'

'But you mustn't suppose that all children think and feel as you did.'

'Oh no ! I hope they don't. But all children must be alike in certain things,—in difficulty of expression, for instance, and in feeling more and thinking more than their elders imagine. People don't realise this, unless they have experience or great sympathy. I hope to make the children about here my friends.'

'You make me almost wish I were a little boy again,' said Henry.

She looked at him with grave inquiry. But he did not explain himself.

'There are so many social duties,' he remarked, vaguely. 'Not only to children.'

'Yes,' she acquiesced. 'But each cannot do all. I have chosen my part.'

'But not exclusively ?'

'I think so.'

'Then the children of Gladeshire are very happy children,' said Henry.

'I hope they are.'

'They must be. You are going to interest yourself in them, to care for them, to—love them.'

She bent her head.

'So they must be happy,' he went on. 'But they won't half appreciate their good fortune. We grown-up people should like you to care for *us*.'

'One cannot do everything,' said she.

'No. But why make the children paramount?'

'I told you on Saturday.'

'But I don't accept that as a reason. The interests of children should *not* be paramount—unless they are one's own children. Believe me, grown-up people need you much more. You were a remarkable child, remarkably situated, and you think all children are like yourself. I assure you they are not. Most children are common-place. They are not misunderstood, and they can and do say all they think. Here and there one meets a sensitive, peculiar child. But most children are as ordinary as daisies. The little St. Roques are. But it is different with grown-up people. All men and women have their distinctions. *They* want you a thousand times more than children do. Especially men. We men *must* have sympathy from women.'

'There are plenty of women,' said Margaret. 'Every one follows his own genius. Mine is for children.'

'So you *say*.'

'So I believe.'

'But you have tried nothing else.'

'True. But I don't wish to try. Now, please go back to the island.'

'To fetch the children!—the children who are to oust me! Upon my word, Miss Jermine, you are cruel!'

There was vexation in his tone.

'I didn't mean to hurt you,' said Margaret, gently. 'But please don't suggest impossible things. You are one of my oldest friends, and I have said things to you that I shouldn't have said to every one. I shall be sorry I said them, if it makes you impatient with me.'

She looked at him, entreatingly. He was mollified at once. Unexpectedly and suddenly, she had confided in him again.

'Forgive me,' he said, quickly. 'I am the last person who would annoy you in any way.'

'I am sure of that,' she said.

'But you don't really think that intrinsically children are better worth cultivating than men and women?'

'No. Only for me.'

'Thank you,' said he, with a significance that made a sudden colour rush into her cheeks.

'Please go and fetch the little ones,' she said.

He obeyed her instantly. In a moment he was gone, and she sat where he had left her, watching him as he rowed across the unrippled water. His back was towards the island, and she was aware that he gazed at her. She felt inexpressibly sad.

'I ought to have been cold—I ought to have been ice-cold,' she said to herself. 'And instead I was warm. It was almost as if we were children again.'

Then she fell to thinking how handsome he was, and how winning, and how happy she should be if she could frankly own that it pleased her to see her old friend again.

'A penny for your thoughts!' cried a voice behind her.

She started. Miss Ovid and Cecily were there.

'What have you done with all the others?' enquired the latter. 'You here all by yourself? Pray, where are the gentlemen?'

'On the island,' replied Margaret. 'Mr. Bartropps was here just now. He has gone back to fetch some of them.'

'I wish he'd waited and I'd have gone with him,' said Cecily. 'It's years since I was on your island, Margaret.'

'My island!' echoed Margaret.

'Yes. It is your island, isn't it?' •

'I suppose it is. But I hardly seem to realise it.'

'Well then, begin to realise it at once,' said Cecily. 'Let me explain things to you, my dear. I perceive you are not at all a woman of the world. Miss Ovid, you haven't done your duty. You haven't instructed Margaret in the art of being an heiress. "My good soul, you are Miss Jermine of Ule, a person upon whom the whole county turns its eye with a very lively interest. You own Ule, which is a very fair estate, with no mean rent-roll, if times were good. Times being bad, your income from rents has diminished. But luckily for you, you have other resources, and I suppose your income is not less than £5,000 a year. Then, my love, you are very beautiful. All the world can see that.'

And we hear that you are very clever and very good, and we partly see it in your face, and we wholly believe in it.'

'Oh, Cecily, stop,' interrupted Margaret.

'No, no. Let me recapitulate,' cried Cecily, counting on her fingers. 'Wealth, beauty, talent, goodness. Or, if you like it better—goodness, talent, beauty, wealth. Added to all this, you are as independent as if you were a man. Oh my!' ejaculated Cecily. 'That's what I say to Regie when I want to disgust him. Regie's rather a nuisance, Margaret, and I want you to take him off my hands. You and he would suit each other down to the ground. You love books. You are grave and majestic. You look like a poem. Now I'm flighty, and if I look like any sort of literature, it's a nursery-rhyme. I like being frivolous. It's nice. It's a joke. When I went to the last drawing-room I laid odds——But never mind. I shock you, Miss Ovid. I won't tell you what my bet was about. But I won it! What were we talking about?'

'What were *you* talking about, Cecily?' said Miss Ovid.

Margaret laughed. Her laughter was low and sweet and brief. Cecily clapped her hands.

'Now I *have* performed a feat,' she exclaimed. 'They are all saying you are too grave, and that you hardly ever smile, and now I have *actually* made you *laugh*!'

'Dear Cecily, I do laugh sometimes,' said Margaret, blushing.

'Not very often, I imagine,' said Cecily. 'I laugh a great deal. I'm happy and pleased, and of course I laugh. Laughing is like purring to a cat, you know. Nothing annoys me—except when Regie is too fond of me. Do take pity on me and on him, Margaret. He's such a nice fellow, and he's thirty-four, and he hasn't got Outwoods yet, and I don't believe his old uncle will ever die.' I've often advised him to marry, and if Miss Jermine of Ule——'

'Cecily, don't say things like that to me,' interrupted Margaret, quietly. 'I am never going to marry.'

'What!' cried Cecily.

'I am never going to marry,' repeated Margaret. 'I never think about it, and I don't care about those kind of jokes.'

'Well, you do surprise me,' said Cecily, after a moment.

'I shouldn't have thought you were a girl to fear being married for your money——'

'I don't think you know what you are saying,' said Margaret, quickly. 'It's not that. I should never think of such a thing as you suggest. I tell you I never think about the subject at all. But I don't care for silly joking about it. You oughtn't——'

Then she stopped abruptly. Her cheeks were scarlet. Her eyes shone. Cecily sat staring at her. Miss Ovid watched her curiously. She was somewhat surprised at this sudden and angry emotion. She wondered what inner thought it might signify.

'I beg your pardon,' stammered Cecily, after a moment.

Then Margaret's manner changed instantly.

'I beg *your* pardon, Cecily,' she said. 'Please forgive me, dear. I didn't mean to speak hotly.'

'Oh, never mind,' cried Cecily. 'I didn't mean anything. I didn't know you'd mind. Girls do talk like that you know. They don't mean any harm. They just do it because they're happy and admired, and they trust nice days are coming. I didn't know you were *really* different to other girls.'

'My father wished it,' said Margaret. 'He wished me not to marry. I am glad I have been led to tell you so. I rather wished people should know.'

'Oh dear, oh dear!' groaned Cecily.

She was completely cast down. She was truly sorry. Her distress was almost amusing.

'Oh, what a pity, what a pity!' she said.

'My dear Cecily, I don't mind in the least,' averred Margaret. 'I am quite happy, and I mean always to be happy.'

'Well, I think it's no end of a pity,' said Cecily, recovering herself. 'It ^{was} selfish of your father, and I hope some day you'll just not attend to his wish. Of course, I'll never tease you, or say anything about it again. But it's a *great* pity, and I'm awfully sorry.'

Cecily was genuinely sorry. She had been brought up to consider that marriage was a fitting and a most happy event, and she imagined that all husbands—or nearly all—were as loving and as devoted as her father. It distressed her, therefore, to think that Margaret was absolutely forbidden to

marry. Nevertheless, unconfessed, she felt a certain sense of relief.

Later in the day she told Henry. He walked home with the Beaulieu party, and Cecily speedily dismissed her brothers and sisters. It was no secret that she liked a *tête-à-tête* with Henry.

‘What a nice afternoon we have had!’ she observed. ‘What a dear, delightful creature Margaret is! Isn’t she lovely?’

‘Very,’ acquiesced Henry.

‘She is something quite out of the common,’ proceeded Cecily. ‘Of course that is natural. Her antecedents were out of the common, and she is bound in an out-of-the-common way.’

‘How do you mean?’ asked Henry.

‘Why, she is bound not to marry. Her father wished her not.’

‘Really?’ ejaculated he.

‘So she told me just now. She said quite seriously that she should never marry, because of Mr. Jerminé’s desire. It seemed as if she meant it. She said she wished people to know it.’

‘Oh!’ said Henry.

‘It was too bad of her father. Wasn’t it?’ said Cecily.

‘Bad! It was utterly unpardonable.’

‘Yes. It seems such a pity.’

‘But of course she won’t stick to it,’ said Henry.

‘I think she will. She seemed very much in earnest.’

‘People always think they are in earnest,’ said Henry. ‘However, it doesn’t matter to us,’ he added. ‘Of course, Margaret—I mean, Miss Jerminé—will do what she chooses. She has a great deal of character, and she is sure to map out her life so as to suit herself. It doesn’t matter to any one else. I met Regie Dryad this morning, Cecily.’

‘Oh, did you? He lunched with us. He’s getting rather a bore.’

‘Is he? Don’t you like him?’

‘Immensely. But one may have too much even of a good thing.’

‘Why don’t you make up your mind, Cecily?’

‘Make up my mind! What to?’

‘Oh, you know. To make Regie happy.’

‘Thank you, Henry,’ said she, stiffly. ‘I can arrange my own affairs.’

‘Oh, I beg your pardon,’ he said, easily. ‘I didn’t mean to offend you. We are such old friends, I thought I might ask.’

‘Pray don’t imagine such a thing is possible,’ said she, loftily.

‘Very well,’ returned he.

Then they walked on in silence. She was angry. He was amused.

‘Come, Cecily, forgive me,’ he said, at last.

‘I think you took a liberty,’ said she.

‘If I did, I am very sorry,’ he protested. ‘Come, my dear, don’t bear malice. You and I are such old friends.’

Then Cecily was forced to smile.

‘I forgive you,’ she said. ‘But you must never again even dream that I could think of making Regie happy.’

CHAPTER XV.

EVERY one came to the afternoon-dance at Homer Court. Those who liked dancing danced in the hall. Those who preferred fresh air sat in the garden. Among the former were Henry and Cecily. Among the latter were the St. Roques, the Hathes, Mrs. Minimy, Dr. Wheble and Isabee, the Primulums and Flora. Miss Ovid and Margaret arrived rather late. So did the Ifes.

Flora Velvetine was in her new hat trimmed with wild roses. She was in a flutter of expectation. She peered behind her acquaintances as she shook hands with them. Her eyes were everywhere.

'No, thanks. I won't dance to-day,' she said to Mrs. Homer.

She remembered that Lucius Cleve did not dance, and she had come to Homer Court to meet him. The question, —Where is He?—was written legibly on her countenance.

'It's really too ridiculous of Flora to go on in this way,' observed Mrs. St. Roque to Mrs. Primulum. 'She ought to know better. She's letting every one see how anxious she is to see Mr. Cleve. I wish she wouldn't.'

'I suppose she can't help it,' said Mrs. Primulum. 'Flora Velvetine is a very disappointing person. I used to think her so sensible, and I declare she's sillier than most girls of seventeen. But papa says it's not altogether her fault. He says that sort of silliness is constitutional with some people.'

'What is constitutional with some people?' asked Wheble, coming up.

'Oh, Dr. Wheble, you've caught us backbiting,' said Mrs. St. Roque, laughing. 'We were talking about poor dear Flora Velvetine. She's rather an enigma to us.'

'An enigma!' ejaculated Wheble. 'She is a goose, my

dear Mrs. St. Roque. That is all. *I* understand her perfectly. She's going to set her cap afresh at the man she jilted ten or twelve years ago. Well, I pity her! Lucius Cleve has a reputation for being sarcastic. But I forget—you know him very well.'

'Yes. My husband thinks very highly of him,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'He *is* rather sarcastic sometimes. I hope he won't be unkind to poor Flora.'

'Poor Flora!' echoed Wheble, in a tone of disgust. 'Now, Mrs. St. Roque, let me tell you your charity is ill-expended. Your poor Flora had the chance once of becoming a good man's wife and of freeing herself from a bad mother. She deliberately put her chance from her out of mere covetousness, because she thought another man had his pockets better lined. She over-reached herself, and I rejoice at it. It served her right. There's no heart in the woman—none!'

'You are very energetic, Dr. Wheble,' observed Mrs. Primulum.

'And I think you are a little bit hard,' added Mrs. St. Roque. 'You don't know what it is to be poor.'

'Poor!' cried Wheble. 'Why she lived in clover till poor Jermine died, and then he left her a very handsome allowance. The woman is utterly heartless. If she'd had one grain of loveableness in her composition she'd have tethered some wretched idiot to her side by now. She has tried to catch scores of unfortunate fellows. But they've all escaped, simply because she doesn't know what love is.'

'But you shouldn't be angry with the poor girl because of that,' expostulated Mrs. Primulum. 'My husband says we might as well be angry with people because they are too tall or too short, or too dark, or too anything. He is never angry. He says people must be as they are.'

'Primulum is right, and I am a fool,' said Wheble. 'But Miss Velvetine has made me very angry. What do you think has come to my ears? I am told that Mrs. and Miss Velvetine have been circulating the report that I have determined to marry Miss Jermine, and that that is why I suggested her going abroad with my niece.'

'Oh, Dr. Wheble, nobody would believe that,' said Mrs. St. Roque, soothingly. 'We all know you too well. Don't

be disturbed about it. No one minds what the Velvetines say. We've settled a much better plan, mamma and I. We think Henry Bartropps——'

She lowered her voice.

'Well—if she marries any one,—' said Wheble, sighing.

'Surely it isn't true that she doesn't mean to marry,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'She told Cecily it was her father's wish she should never marry. But surely it isn't true? Surely you won't allow it?'

'I have nothing to do with it,' said Wheble. 'I have nothing whatever to do with Miss Jermine beyond being her most sincere friend. She came of age at eighteen. She was actually of age at the time of her father's death.'

'But you have great influence,' urged Mrs. St. Roque. '*Do* persuade her to marry!'

Wheble laughed.

'My dear Mrs. St. Roque, I think I'll leave that to some younger man,' he said. 'If I began persuading Miss Jermine to marry, there might come to be some truth in this malicious report of the Velvetines. Indeed, as far as I am personally concerned, I like Margaret as she is.'

'Who is Miss Jermine talking to now?' asked Mrs. Primulum. 'Why, to Mr. Ife, I do believe!'

'Well, why not?' returned Wheble, coolly. 'He can't hurt any one but himself and his poor wife. Miss Jermine may do him good. I'd quite as soon see her talking to Ife as to Henry Bartropps.'

'My dear Dr. Wheble!' cried Mrs. St. Roque. 'Why, we were thinking——'

'I know, I know,' interrupted he. 'You ladies always see things from the outside. Given a good-looking young man, with a respectable purse and polished manners, and you're content, and you'd marry him off to Aphrodite herself, if you had the chance. But, men see deeper. We know each other. Henry Bartropps is a remarkably good fellow. I say nothing against him. He is steady and fairly clever, and well-principled. But he is too well with himself, and he is commonplace, and he hasn't the ultra-integrity that Margaret would look for in a husband.' He isn't worthy of her. He wouldn't understand her. He couldn't rise to her heights. Regie Dryad would suit her much better.'

'That's what Cecily says,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'But unfortunately——'

'Ah, Cecily is a very shrewd girl,' said Wheble. 'Of course, young people must manage these things for themselves, and if Henry Bartropps can induce Miss Jermine to quit Ule, I sha'n't offer any resistance. But Cecily would suit him much better. He'd understand her, and his triteness of character wouldn't vex her. Don't be offended, Mrs. St. Roque. Cecily is perfect in her way. But she isn't quite the gem Margaret Jermine is.'

'He is such a funny man,' said Mrs. St. Roque, when Wheble had moved away. 'Of course I should never dream of being offended with him. But isn't he odd?'

'Papa says he's a clever man without ballast,' remarked Mrs. Primulum. 'It's amusing the way he lets everything out. He thinks he is as secret as the grave, and we all know his opinions as well as he knows them himself. I was rather surprised at his estimation of Henry Bartropps.'

'Henry is charming,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'Big Adrian quite agrees with me in thinking Ule and Bartropps were meant to be united.'

At this moment, Lucius Cleve arrived, with his mother and sisters.

'What is the matter, Miss Velvetine?' asked Primulum, who was standing near her. 'Did you see a ghost? or are you ill? Can I do anything for you?'

'Thank you, I am perfectly well,' returned Flora, pettishly. 'I don't know what you mean.'

'But you look quite agitated, my dear Miss Velvetine,' continued Primulum. 'Sun too much for you? Is that it? You should be careful. I've told you before that that little parasol of yours doesn't shield your head enough. You should have a sensible sunshade, like my wife's.'

'Thank you, Mr. Primulum, I don't require any one's help as to how I dress,' retorted Flora. 'I believe I am quite competent to manage my own toilet.'

'Oh, pray forgive me,' cried Primulum. 'I can't bear to quarrel with an old friend. How many years have we known each other, Miss Velvetine? It must be thirteen years—ever since my wife and Mrs. St. Roque were brides. And by the same token, there's that clever fellow, Lucius Cleve! He hasn't been in Gladeshire since the summer we were married.'

What a good-looking man he has become, Miss Velvetine ! And what a first-rate man, too ! I understand the Tag Rag and Bobtail Office is making itself felt under his control. They tell me he lives in quite a princely style. Pity he isn't married ! Oh, there he is talking to Isabee Ovid. What a handsome girl she is ! Perhaps——'

'Mr. Primulum, how you do run on !' exclaimed Flora. 'Talk of a woman's tongue indeed ! Why, even Mrs. Minimy could hardly beat you !'

'I'm sorry—I'm afraid I've made your head ache,' said Primulum, with solicitude. 'But about Cleve. Did you know him ?'

'I did,' replied Flora. 'And as I wish to renew his acquaintance, excuse me, Mr. Primulum.'

The doctor laughed to himself as she crossed the lawn towards the spot where Lucius Cleve was standing by the side of Isabee Ovid.

'I haven't been in Gladeshire for thirteen years,' Cleve was telling Isabee.

He did not know who she was. He had not caught her name, and the tall, handsome woman before him did not immediately remind him of the little girl who had comforted him in his anguish in the distant past. She, however, knew him.

'That is a long time,' she remarked.

'Yes. My father died, and my mother and sisters went abroad. They have only just returned.'

'I know. I had the pleasure of calling upon them the other day.'

'Then you live here ?' he asked.

'Yes. At Gladestreet House, with my uncle.'

'With Dr. Wheble ?'

'Yes.'

'Then you must be Miss Ovid,' he said. 'I ought to have remembered you. But—— You must pardon me.'

'Oh yes,' she said, blushing a little beneath his attentive gaze. 'Thirteen years is a long time. I was almost a little girl then.'

'You were very kind to me,' said Cleve. 'I have never forgotten your kindness.'

'Was I ? I always thought I was such a stupid little girl,' said she with *naïveté*.

'You were nothing of the kind. You were my salvation. I think, if it hadn't been for you, I should have gone off and drowned myself. I was very unhappy. You remember the occasion?'

'Yes.'

'I have never spoken of it to a human being,' said he. 'But it's no good hiding it from you. You may be interested to hear that I have quite got over it. It took some time. But I can think of it now calmly. What has become of Miss Velvetine?'

'This is she coming towards us,' said Isabee.

Cleve put up his eye-glass. Flora saw the action, and it discomposed her. True, her whilom lover was thirty-eight, and it was not wonderful that an eye-glass should have become necessary to him. But it perturbed her that he should put it up for the purpose of looking at her. There was a certain *nonchalance* about the act that mortified her. It annoyed her, also, that Cleve should be talking to Isabee.

'Isabee Ovid is a mere chit,' said Flora to herself, as she came forward, her little parasol shaking in her nervous fingers.

'Miss Velvetine, I think?' said Cleve, stepping forward.

'Oh, Mr. Cleve, is it you? It is really you?' exclaimed Flora.

She held out her hand. He took it for an instant.

'What superb weather!' he remarked.

'What a long time since we have met!' she murmured.

The two little sentences were spoken simultaneously. Then there was a moment's pause. Cleve looked gravely first at Flora, then at Isabee.

'Are you going away, Miss Ovid?' he said. 'Pray don't. There is room for us all on this bench. Besides, Miss Velvetine will take this chair.'

Confused and disappointed, Flora seated herself in the place that he indicated. She could scarcely believe that this man with the commanding aspect was her old lover. She looked at him furtively from beneath the lace that edged her parasol. Yes. It was undoubtedly Lucius. But it was Lucius enormously changed.

'It is so nice to see old friends again,' she observed, plaintively.

'Do you think so?' said Cleve. 'After long intervals there are startling changes. Some of us are married, and

some who used to be of us are dead. I sport an eye-glass, and you, Miss Velvetine—But I beg your pardon. Perhaps I miscall you?’

‘No,’ said Flora, faintly.

‘No?’ repeated he. ‘Well, time works many changes. Tell me the news of Gladshire, Miss Ovid? Is every one married, except you and me and Miss Velvetine?’

‘Oh, no,’ said Isabee. ‘Indeed I don’t think there have been any marriages of much importance since you left Gladshire, nor any deaths of much importance either,—except Mr. Jermine’s,’ she added.

Then she got up, and walked away swiftly. Cleve looked after her.

‘What a handsome creature she has grown!’ he said. ‘When I saw her last, she was just a pretty little girl.’

‘Yes. I believe she is admired,’ said Flora. ‘I didn’t recollect that you knew her.’

Cleve looked at her for a moment. But his love for her had completely died within him, and not a pulse stirred as he regarded her. In truth, he was wondering how he had ever cared for this pale and meagre woman, with the discontented face, and he thought, with contempt, that the fancies of young men were inexplicably foolish.

‘I hope Mrs. Velvetine is well,’ he said, abruptly.

‘Yes, thank you.’

‘Is she here?’

‘No. The Primulums kindly brought me. I am educating their children. It is rather wearing.’

‘I dare say. One’s duty often palls. Daily routine is generally more or less dull. I find it so sometimes.’

‘Are you still in the Tag, Rag, and Bobtail Office?’ asked Flora.

‘Yes. I am the Chief Clerk now.’

He looked at her keenly.

‘Oh,’ she murmured, reddening.

But he had pity on her. He had earned the reputation of being satirical. But he did not bring his powers to bear upon the woman whom he had once loved. People who knew him well considered him to be hard-hearted. But none had ever found him ungenerous. So he did not remind her that he had accomplished his ambition. But he began to talk to her presently upon ordinary topics, and to ask

of her more minute details concerning his old Gladeshire acquaintances.

‘And how is little Miss Jermine?’ he inquired at last.

‘She is not little Miss Jermine now,’ replied Flora. ‘She is tall, and I think decidedly gawky. She is a very shy, awkward girl. She has just come to settle at Ule.’

‘She used to be a very pretty child,’ said Cleve.

‘I brought her up till she was eighteen,’ said Flora. ‘But she doesn’t do me much credit. She is very odd. I hadn’t fair play with her. Her father had most extraordinary notions.’

‘You knew him very well, I suppose,’ observed Cleve. ‘Somebody told me he contemplated marrying again.’

‘Did they?’

‘So I heard.’

‘It is possible,’ said Flora. ‘But it never would have been. People were very ill-natured—they always are. I was *forced* to see Mr. Jermine frequently, because I had the entire charge of Margaret. But I never thought of such a thing. If only people wouldn’t talk! It was impossible for me to entertain such a thought.’

She looked down. She was embarrassed. ‘I hadn’t heard any particulars,’ said Cleve, dryly.

‘Please don’t repeat what I have said, Mr. Cleve. I told you in confidence.’

‘Certainly.’

‘I am often not very happy, and I don’t want to be made unhappier by people saying I gossip.’

He was silent.

‘I am often not very happy,’ she repeated. ‘Life is rather dreary. Isn’t it?’

‘I hardly agree,’ said he. ‘That is, I am too busy to find it so.’

‘But did you never?’ she asked anxiously.

‘Well, yes. Once I tasted a very bitter cup. But I got over it.’

‘Quite?’

‘Quite.’

There was a brief pause.

‘I don’t get over things,’ said Flora, tremulously. ‘Circumstances make my life very trying. You remember mamma? Well, she is mamma still and just the same. She always leads me wrong. She did then.’

‘When?’ he asked.

‘*Then.* Don’t you remember? Oh, Lucius, don’t you remember?’

He did not reply for a few seconds. Then he spoke gravely.

‘I know what you mean,’ he said, with candour. ‘I am aware to what you refer. But if Mrs. Velvetine interfered, I suppose she knew what she wished. At all events, everything turns out for the best ultimately. That is an axiom of mine.’

‘Do you really think so?’ said Flora.

‘I do. Let us be friends, Miss Velvetine.’

She could not speak. It was with difficulty that she kept her tears from falling. He had compassion on her, and passed again to usual topics.

‘Who is that beautiful woman in dark green?’ he asked. ‘I mean the young lady who is crossing the lawn with two or three children. Now she is speaking to Miss Isabee Ovid, and when I arrived I saw her talking to poor Ife.’

‘That!’ ejaculated Flora. ‘That is Margaret Jermine. Yes, I saw her talking to Mr. Ife. He is a curious companion for a young lady—a disreputable creature who is never sober.’

Ife of Red Oaks was sober on this afternoon, however, and, during a brief period of repentance and remorse, had been induced by his wife to show himself in society. Margaret had begged to be introduced to the pale and melancholy woman, and to the burly, red-faced man, whose story she knew and deplored.

‘I haven’t seen you since you were a little girl and used to ride by me on your pony,’ Ife had said to her.

‘Now I hope I shall ride up to your house,’ Margaret had returned.

‘My wife will be very glad,’ Ife had rejoined. ‘I am hardly ever at home.’

‘You must please be at home to me,’ Margaret had said. Ife had shaken his head.

‘My dear Miss Jermine, no one ever wants to see me,’ he had declared. ‘The county has treated me very badly. I’m out of the hunt altogether. Of course it doesn’t signify. I don’t lose much. I don’t care for society. I just leave ‘em alone, and live my own life.’

'Won't you come and see me, Mr. Ife?' Margaret had asked. 'I don't believe you've been at Ule since I was born.'

'Not since the day of your mother's funeral,' Ife had said.

'It was kind of you to come then,' Margaret had ended. 'Now I must beg you to come again to see me.'

Thus urged, Ife had promised to come, and later in the day he told his wife that Miss Jermine was very handsome and exceedingly good company.

'She's not going to blackball me,' he said. 'I always liked the Jermines. They're the right sort—no priggishness. Which day did she ask us to dinner? I'll drink water till the day after.'

Which resolution he kept. For the power of volition was yet his.

'I think I can rest a little now,' said Mrs. Homer, sitting down beside Mrs. Hathe and Mrs. Minimy. 'Every one seems settled down at something. I couldn't persuade Miss Jermine to dance. She said she preferred playing with the little ones. She seems a sweet girl, and is very handsome.'

'She'll quite cut out all the other girls, I expect,' said Mrs. Hathe.

'Oh, I'm not afraid for mine,' rejoined Mrs. Homer. 'Ule is a long way off. It's the near neighbours one dreads. You are our immediate neighbours, Mrs. Hathe, and I'm sure your dear girls will never clash——'

'Did you see Mr. Ife talking to Margaret?' interrupted Mrs. Minimy. 'My dear Mrs. Homer, he is safe, I trust?'

'Oh yes!' returned Mrs. Homer. 'Poor Mr. Ife hurts no one but himself and his wife. I was glad to see Miss Jermine speaking to him.'

'It's a thousand pities,' murmured Mrs. Minimy. 'I can't imagine why men take to drinking. Such ruin to the appearance! Why, Mr. Ife can't be much more than forty, and he looks sixty! It's very grievous. And his nose all red! And his poor eyes! He's simply an object. If Henry had taken to wild ways, it would have killed me. Fancy that dear boy looking like a guy! Mr. Ife's poor nose is like an absolute radish!'

'Are we to call on Miss Jermine? or is she going to shut herself up as her father did?' inquired Mrs. Hathe. 'Some one told me she had taken a vow not to marry.'

'Some one told *me* she was half-engaged to Dr. Wheble,' said Mrs. Homer.

'That was Flora Velvetine, I'm sure,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'It doesn't do to believe all she says. She is embittered by her own disappointment. She did a stupid thing when she broke off her engagement to Mr. Cleve. I've a horror of breaking off an engagement. Nothing so much destroys a girl's prospects. Men don't mind widows. But a jilt——! It's quite honourable to be dead, but when it comes to being jilted! Then the young men draw back. They can't risk mortification. My father always said to us—Know your own mind, and stick to it. He was an officer and understood discipline. Poor Flora was born under a disadvantage. Her father never rose. He lived and died a junior clerk in the Tag, Rag, and Bobtail Office. That was how Mr. Cleve knew them. I believe poor Mr. Velvetine was very amiable. But I don't suppose he had the slightest notion of common sense. Flora has inherited the deficiency. She is a good girl. But she has no appreciation of realities.'

Flora had joined Mrs. St. Roque and Mrs. Primulum. She was considerably mortified by her colloquy with Cleve. She had perceived that it would be impossible for her to reinstate herself in his affections. He had said openly that that which had been was best. Then he had left her to join Margaret and Isabce, and she had felt neglected and old.

'They are chits,' she had said to herself, looking at the younger women.

But it was not sufficient to say this to herself. She wanted to explain herself in her own way to some one else. So she approached the two happy young matrons, who were still loyal to the friend of their youth.

'I've just been having a chat with my old friend Lucius Cleve,' she said, airily. 'He is so little changed—just the same simple fellow as ever! It's quite wonderful how he has got on.'

'People think so very highly of him,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'Every one considers him so immensely clever.'

'Do they?' said Flora, condescendingly. 'Of course I knew him so well. No one is a hero—or a genius—to his intimates. He was rather embarrassed when I came up. I dare say he thought I shouldn't speak. But I make a point of forgiving and forgetting. As Mr. Primulum says, life is

too short for rancour. I never bear a grudge. Of course poor Lucius behaved very ill. But he was young, and I excuse him. I met him with perfect cordiality. It made me smile in my sleeve to see how uncomfortable he looked.'

'He is a very distinguished-looking man,' observed Mrs. Primulum.

'What!' cried Flora. 'Why, he was always plain and heavy-looking, and now he is portly, and wears an eye-glass! I can't bear an eye-glass. I shall have to think about that eye-glass a good deal before—— But no matter. Poor Lucius could hardly tear himself away. But I insisted. I couldn't let him take things for granted. So I told him to go and be introduced to our heiress—Margaret Jermine, I mean. It's a pity she's going to marry Dr. Wheble. Isn't it?'

'But is she?' asked both the other ladies.

'Well, I believe so,' said Flora. 'I hear Dr. Wheble half lives at Ule. However, he will be punished for his cupidity. Margaret has an awful temper. I shall never forget the scenes I went through with her. The fact is, she has an uncommonly bad disposition. Look at her to-day. First, she is seen talking to that respectable Mr. Ife. Then she goes off, romping, with a pack of children. Lastly, she is hand in glove with Isabee Ovid, who is a regular flirt. One would have expected poor Mr. Jermine's daughter to be more sober-minded. But she won't listen to me, though I know exactly what her father wished her to be.'

'My dear Miss Velvetine, your energy is giving you quite a nice colour,' said Primulum.

He had come up with Wheble. Flora tossed her head.

'Mr. Primulum, you are ubiquitous,' she said, pettishly.

'Oh! moths always seek the light,' returned he. 'When attractive people——'

'Now, papa, don't be a tease,' interposed Mrs. Primulum. 'We were just having a quiet little chat, we three. You shouldn't interrupt.'

'But I really wanted to know what interested Miss Velvetine so much,' insisted Primulum.

'We were talking about Margaret Jermine,' said Flora. 'I have heard all sorts of things about her,' she added, glancing at Wheble.

'Of course,' said Primulum. 'That she is young, extremely beautiful, exceptionally clever, particularly amiable——'

'No. I haven't heard that,' said Flora, pressing her lips together.

'Have you heard that Lucius Cleve has come to Gladeshire on purpose to see her?' asked Wheble.

'Nonsense,' cried Flora, sharply.

'Oh! no doubt of it,' said Primulum, nodding his head. 'All the young men are agog to see Miss Jermine. I am afraid every one else will be at a discount now, Miss Velvetine.'

'The young men!' repeated Flora. 'It isn't a young man whom I have heard of in connexion with Margaret Jermine.'

'Pray whom have you heard of in connexion with her?' asked Wheble.

'I decline to say, Dr. Wheble. I will leave you to guess. But I advise all these young men, as Mr. Primulum calls them, to be very careful. I know Margaret Jermine only too well.'

'You can't know her better than I do,' said Wheble.

'I dare say not,' returned she.

'Why do you advise the young men to be careful?' demanded he.

'I shall not say. If you know her so well, you ought to know why.'

'She is an angel, Miss Velvetine.'

'Is she?' said Flora, dryly. 'I hope you will always find her so.'

'I think she is lovely,' observed Mrs. Primulum.

'And I am sure she is clever,' added her husband. 'I never saw a better head. She is the very person for Cleve, Miss Velvetine. He is a first-rate man, and his wife must be intellectual.'

'I think you are all very ridiculous,' cried Flora. 'Margaret Jermine is a novelty. But she is neither pretty nor clever. She is passably good looking, because she is rich and can dress well. But she is ill-tempered, and her great mind does not soar beyond romping with babies.'

Margaret did not know how unkindly she was judged by her old governess. She had retired into a remote corner of the large garden, taking a group of children with her, and accompanied by Isabee and Cleve. The latter was greatly attracted by Isabee. It softened him to remember how gently she had spoken to him in the day of his tribulation. The

children gathered round Margaret. Cleve and Isabee stood a little way apart.

'It is strange to come back to the stage of one's youth, and to find one has completely forgotten one's chief character,' he said. 'Only one remembrance of the past is still alive—the sympathy I met with in an evil hour.'

She made no remark.

'That lives,' he added, with emphasis. 'The rest is dead—utterly dead.'

Then Cecily and Henry made their appearance.

'We have been looking for you everywhere,' cried the former. 'Really, Margaret, your craze for the society of the innocents is a trifle inconvenient! Why do you hide away in holes and corners? Why don't you keep in the open?'

Henry had gone straight to where Margaret sat in the centre of the little ones.

'I have been wanting to talk to you so much,' he said.

'I was with the children,' she rejoined, in a low, clear voice.

CHAPTER XVI.

As time went on, Henry Bartropps discovered that, for once, he could not easily get his own way. Margaret did not respond to his advances. The best he could say to himself was that she did not repulse him. But her encouragement was of so negative a character that, had his will been less strong and his desire less ardent, he would have abandoned his suit.

The young mistress of Ule soon gained a somewhat paradoxical reputation. She was a sweet creature, people said, with womanly ways. But she was eccentric, they said also, and totally unlike other girls. No one believed in the rumoured report that she had been forbidden to marry, or, at least, no one credited the daughter with the determination to obey the unnatural behest. Therefore it was said against her that she was cold, that she had no natural liking for the society of the other sex, that she was too mature and too self-contained for a maiden of her years. Certainly, she knew every one and went everywhere. But she did not encourage universally intimate relations, and, except to a very few, she evinced no geniality. She treated her acquaintances with courtesy. But she treated them with decided formality. To the Ifes alone, of her more distant neighbours, she unbent, and people thought that of all her idiosyncrasies, this was the strangest. That she should appear to take pleasure in the society of a middle-aged and melancholy woman and of a man who was rarely sober seemed beyond measure extraordinary.

But if Margaret somewhat perplexed and annoyed her equals, to the children of Gladeshire her return to Ule was an event of unparalleled joy. Ere she had been at home a month, she knew the names of all the children in the county, and had made the acquaintance of half of them.

The little rustics had treats in her grounds. The children of the upper classes were entertained in twos and threes. A whole suite of apartments was set apart for the use of juvenile guests, and Margaret engaged two school-room maids. She always had three or four little boys and girls staying with her. No sooner did one relay take its departure than another carriageful arrived. A veritable children's kingdom had commenced. It seemed as if Miss Jermine could not exist without child companionship.

Parents made no demur. Margaret was extremely indulgent. But she enforced the promptest and the most implicit obedience, and the most unruly children were compelled to succumb to her authority. She took endless pains to secure the happiness of her young friends. But she insisted on good conduct, and children who were rebellious were sent home.

'Good-bye, George,' Margaret had been heard to say to an urchin who was crying bitterly at being sent away at the end of a day and a half when he had been asked for a week. 'I hope when I invite you to come again, that I shall be able to keep you.'

'Mayn't—I—stay—now?' George had sobbed. 'I'll n—never—do it—again, Aunt—Margaret.'

'No, my dear,' she had replied. 'I told you this morning that if you disobeyed me again, I should send you home, and I must keep my word. I am not angry with you. But I can't have any one here who likes being naughty.'

So George had departed, wailing and in despair. But when he was invited to Ule again, his docility was unimpeachable.

Margaret loved her child-companions heartily. She, who had no smiles for gentlemen who would have died to serve her, smiled unceasingly upon the boys and girls who flocked about her. She, whose laughter was never heard in society, laughed all day among her little friends. She, whose dignified bearing was condemned as ill-befitting so young a person, ran and danced with her young guests, and led their merriest games. She was untiring in her exertions to please the comrades whom she had chosen. At the early breakfast-table, she appeared sweet and smiling. All through the day, she moved amongst her little ones, not always joining in their sports, but ever aware of the occupation and the whereabouts of each. And in the hush of eventide, she

would gather the little company around her, and talk to them, in simple words, of things that were pure and noble, and play to them music that seemed to uplift their fancies and their longings, and sing with them hymns and songs that touched their hearts and filled them with wishes to be good. She was always serene, always gentle, always just, always firm. No child ever over-reached her. But no child ever relied upon her in vain. No child might disobey her. But no child suffered disappointment at her hands. She was never capricious, never impatient. More than this, her infinite sympathy gave her a large insight, and if any had a special bent to be cultivated, an embryo ambition to be stimulated, a morbid grief to be remedied, a secret fault to be eliminated, she was sure to discover it, and to use her knowledge of it with wisdom.

'Miss Jermine is really a very wonderful person,' remarked Mrs. Homer, one day. 'She can have had absolutely no experience of children, and yet I don't know any one who manages them better or understands them so well.'

'It is genius,' said Mrs. Ife.

'Genius!' cried Flora Velvetine. 'It's nothing in the world but waywardness. Margaret Jermine always was wayward. One had only to suggest an idea, and she was sure to do the very opposite. I told her plainly she was doing what her father would disapprove. I went up to Ule, and I said, "What are these children here for?" And she said, "Mind your own affairs."'

'O Flora, surely Margaret never said such a thing!' exclaimed Mrs. Minimy.

'She didn't say those words,' admitted Flora. 'But she looked it. She got quite red, and she shook with anger. She was almost ready to strike me. I saw that. Indeed, I was almost frightened, she was in such a temper. But I kept my eye on her, and when she had cooled down a little, I came away. She is a most disagreeable girl.'

'My dear Flora, you exaggerate,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'Margaret is a very delightful girl, and quite incapable of rudeness or ill-temper. In fact, I never knew any one take a hint so well. I've given her several, and she always thanks me. It was because of what I said that she got up the dancing-class. I told her children's figures were of the utmost importance. I had Blanche taught dancing when

she was quite a toddle. And Henry too. And both of them have figures to be proud of.'

'Well, I consider Margaret Jermine's conduct odious,' said Flora. 'It is against the dictates of common sense and of filial piety. If my poor friend, Mr. Jermine, had conceived such headstrong doings possible, I am convinced he would have left the girl under strict guardianship. Probably he would have appointed—— But never mind! Hurt as I am at Margaret's ingratitude, I prefer to say nothing about Mr. Jermine's unexampled confidence in me.'

'But how has Miss Jermine violated the rules of common sense?' inquired Mrs. Ife. 'She seems to me to be as wise as she is loving.'

'She's a little idiot,' said Flora, contemptuously. 'Mark my words, she will tire of her infant school before a year is out. She has repudiated the one person who could have helped her to carry out her father's wishes, and in a twelve-month, we shall see her dancing and flirting with Cecily St. Roque, and a year later, she will outrage Mr. Jermine's will and marry. She's got her eye on Henry Bartropps,—that I know. She had him to lunch in the most barefaced way the very first day she was at Ule. You see if I'm not right.'

Flora's prognostications did not, however, prove correct. Margaret did not weary of her child-companions, neither did she evince any desire to mix more freely with the world, nor did she offer any encouragement to Henry Bartropps. On the contrary, as the months rolled by, she became more and more immersed in her chosen pursuit of educating the young and rendering them happy.

One day, soon after Christmas, Henry, coming to call, found her, as usual, surrounded by children. Sitting in the firelight, she was telling her young companions a strange and heroic tale.

'Go on, go on!' they cried, when she rose to greet the visitor.

But she shook her head.

'No, no,' she said. 'We mustn't forget manners. I think one ought to be an Argus to teach children the amenities of society,' she added, looking at Henry.

'Indeed, yes,' acquiesced he. 'I wonder you try. Come, youngsters, clear off! You can see Miss Jermine all day, you know.'

'Aunt Margaret likes to have us near her,' said one child, resentfully.

'Of course I do, dear,' said Margaret, gently. 'But what was I telling you this morning? There is a time for everything. Now I am going to give Mr. Bartropps a cup of tea, and all of you go to the other end of the room and play at Loto. And Mary, would you mind running up stairs first, and will you tell Miss Ovid that Mr. Bartropps is here and we are going to have tea? Thank you, my dear.'

'How *can* you live always in this atmosphere!' exclaimed Henry. 'It would kill me.'

'I like it,' said Margaret.

'It would bore me insufferably,' he went on. 'How you can endure it is a miracle to me.'

'But I like it,' repeated she, smiling.

'Yes. That's what puzzles me. How *can* you like it?—you, who are so clever, and who have so many intellectual tastes! The minds of these children cannot satisfy your mind.'

'You are afraid I shall rust, Mr. Bartropps? I am guarding against that. I make a point of reading and practising for an hour every day.'

'I didn't mean that,' he said. 'You know more than enough already—a great deal more than most people probably. But you are filling your life with an enormous responsibility, and you are undertaking a drudgery which often presses heavily even upon mothers.'

'I assure you, it is not a drudgery to me,' said she.

'But it must be,' he protested. 'You said just now that one must be an Argus to teach children.'

'Yes. But I like it,' she repeated.

'I hate it,' said he, impatiently.

'Why?' she asked.

He looked at her, without replying. 'He did not deem this to be either the time or the place for explaining why he disliked her line of conduct.'

'I am sorry you disapprove,' said she, after a moment. 'I was going to tell you of a further plan which I am about to execute.'

'Pray tell me,' he rejoined, mollified at her confidence. 'I shall be interested, even if I disapprove.'

‘I am about to establish a school—here at Ule—for the children of gentlemen,’ she explained. ‘I have my own ideas about education, and the chief is, that it would be a good thing to educate boys and girls together,—at least until the boys arrive at an age for public schools. I am sure it is wrong and unwise, because unnatural, to separate boys and girls so much, and I believe it is often mere idleness which suggests it. The boys tease the girls, and the girls *gêne* the boys, and, to save trouble, the parents separate them. Now I think it would be far better to teach the boys to be gentle, and the girls to be brave, and both to be considerate and unselfish, and let them share each other’s amusements as much as possible. As to lessons, I am convinced, there being so little difference between the masculine and feminine brain, that the intellectual education of boys and girls might be identical with advantage.’

‘Good heavens!’ ejaculated Henry, finding breath at last. ‘You will fill the place with blue-stockings!’

‘I hope not. I dislike what is meant by a blue-stocking. But I own I should like to give my little girls as liberal an education as I have had myself.’

‘And in what is it to end?’ asked Henry.

‘In what is it to end? Why in——’

Then she hesitated. It seemed to her that she could not speak to this young man of the end she had in view.

‘If it is to end in a lot of independent old maids, I don’t say Amen to it,’ said Henry.

‘I don’t intend that it shall so end,’ rejoined she.

‘No. You don’t *intend*. But don’t you know that when you begin to let in water, you can’t always stop the flow? Your system of education for girls means a system of utter independence,—a system which will make women feel that men are nothing to them.’

‘Not necessarily, surely.’

‘No. You are not necessarily poisoned because you drink impure water. But nineteen persons out of twenty are poisoned nevertheless. It is a mistake to educate women as if they were men. Anything which engenders independence in women is a mistake. It is an abnormal state of things if women are to be independent of men.’

‘But I never meant that,’ pleaded Margaret. ‘I never

meant to educate my girls as if they were boys. I meant that the boys and girls should grow up together and——'

She paused again. She fondly hoped that the young men would eventually marry the little sweethearts of their early years. But it was impossible to say this to Henry.

'You want to make them equal,' he said, impatiently. 'I know what you mean, and I disapprove *in toto*. Men and women can't be equal. It is against nature that they should be. By trying to equalise them, you destroy the universal harmony. But even then you can't succeed. It is a law of nature that men and women should be different.'

Henry made this assertion with a great assumption of orthodox manhood. He had no notion that he was covering a certain sense of narrowness and inferiority with bluster. Margaret listened meekly. She would have argued the point with any one else. With this man she could not argue it. She was glad that, at this moment, Miss Ovid came into the room. The conversation dropped, and Henry soon went away. But he returned the next day, penitent.

'I spoke so rudely, yesterday,' he said, when Margaret had, as before, dismissed the children. 'It amazed me afterwards that I should have expressed my opinions so freely to you,—I, who want of all things to stand well in your estimation.'

It was the first time that he had spoken thus, and for a moment Margaret's pulses thrilled. Then she remembered that love was not for her.

'I am glad you have the courage of your opinions,' she said, coldly. 'I should be sorry if you said anything to me that you did not mean.'

'But I oughtn't to have been rude.'

'Oh, you were not rude.'

'You are kind to say so. But I know I was. I spoke hotly, because I felt strongly.'

'It doesn't matter,' said she.

'You mean it won't alter your determination?'

'I didn't mean that. But of course it will not.'

There was a slight pause.

'You are still offended with me?' said Henry.

'Indeed, I have never been offended with you,' returned she.

'You are so distant with me to-day,' he complained.

His reproach brought a quick and vivid colour into her cheeks.

'You see, you are not interested in what principally interests me,' she said, lamely.

'Am I not? But I will be. Let me hear your whole scheme, and I promise I will say nothing to displease you.'

'Nay,' she objected. 'I don't want you to do that. I would rather you should say what you think. I don't at all want you to simulate an approval you don't feel.'

'I will do anything you like,—only don't refuse me your confidence,' he urged.

She hesitated. She knew that she ought to wrap herself in a mantle of inaccessibility. But how could she do this? It was so sweet to her to converse with this old friend of her childhood, and she desired greatly that he should be in sympathy with her. She did not expect that he should applaud her scheme. But she felt that if he would acknowledge its reasonableness, she would be content. She had lain awake on the previous night, thinking over his imperious condemnation of her opinions, and it had seemed to her that, although she might not love Henry Bartrop's, the world would be uninhabitable to her if he should despise her.

'Do tell me all about it?' he entreated. 'I was surprised yesterday when you spoke of a school, and I never arrived at knowing quite what you meant. Do tell me the whole matter?'

Then she yielded.

'The whole matter isn't very much,' said she. 'It is simply this. I have a large, empty house, and I propose filling it with children whom I shall educate. I shall have assistance. But I shall do a great deal of the teaching myself. My aim will be to cultivate the reason. I shall try to give my pupils a wide superstructure of general understanding, rather than to cram them with an immense number of initial details.'

'And shall you not be afraid of making them superficial?'

'No. If my plan succeeds, my children will be impressed with a sense of their own ignorance and of the magnitude of the arts and sciences, and they will be filled with a thirst for learning. I want to give them breadth and strength,—

breadth, by opening universal history to them,—strength, by teaching them logic and mathematics.’

‘And will any parents agree?’

‘Several have agreed. Twenty pupils are coming to me on the 17th. They will live here for five days of every week. They will go home from Saturday to Monday. I have no wish to destroy home affections or parental influence.’

‘Then on Saturdays and Sundays you will be free?’ said Henry, eagerly.

‘Yes. I shall be free to entertain other children who are being differently educated.’

Henry looked at her fixedly for a moment.

‘You are incomprehensible,’ he said. ‘I don’t know what you mean.’

She, in her turn, regarded him for a few seconds before she replied.

‘I spoke to you once about my father and his philosophy,’ said she, with an effort. ‘I cannot entirely obey him. I need companionship, and I need interests. My children supply me with both. In associating myself with them, I hope I am not violating his instructions. What he specially cautioned me to avoid was——’

She paused.

‘What?’ demanded Henry.

‘Friendship—and love.’

‘But he was——’ began Henry. ‘Your father was hardly accountable. Every one knows—you yourself told me—that he was strangely and terribly affected by your mother’s death.’

‘I promised him,’ said Margaret. ‘I promised to try and fulfil his wishes, and on his death-bed he reminded me of the letter he had written me, containing his latest instructions. They were the same as he had told me by word of mouth.’

A silence ensued. Then a clear child-voice sounded from the other end of the room.

‘If Aunt Margaret were to be married, I wonder if she’d have all of us to be bridesmaids,’ said a little maid whose eldest sister had been lately a bride.

‘Of course not,’ returned a boy, contemptuously. ‘Aunt Margaret doesn’t think of such silly things. Nobody but a ridiculous girl would dream of being a bridesmaid.’

'Now, Tom, don't be rude,' cried the girl.

'Shut up,' returned 'Tom. 'Don't be finikin. Aunt Margaret says——'

'Hush, Tom!' interposed a third child. 'It's so rude to make a row when Aunt Margaret has visitors.'

'It's such awful bad form,' added another boy.

'Do you hear that?' said Margaret, smiling faintly. That's what you used to say to me when we were children, and you never would let me take advantage of Velvetine.'

'Yes. I was a little brute.'

'Oh no!'

'I used to call you Peggy then.'

'Yes.'

'And see what it has come to! If you make all these boys as unhappy as I am, your scheme—forgive me for saying it!—will have done far more harm than good.'

She could not speak. It was impossible that she could say to this man,—*The cases are not analogous. No father's embargo will separate these girls and boys, and therefore I wish them to grow up together, and to love and to marry in due course.* Instinctively, she covered her face with her hands.

'Peggy, may I speak to you?' said Henry.

'No. Oh no! Pray do not,' she murmured.

'But I must. Listen, dear! Oh, Peggy, listen!'

'No, no!' she struggled to say. 'Don't speak. I oughtn't to have let you say what you did. It was unkind of me. I oughtn't to flirt with an old friend. Oh, how hot it is!'

She was desperately excited. Her eyes shone and her cheeks were scarlet.

'Flirt!' echoed Henry, bewildered.

'Yes,—flirt. Didn't you know? But I shouldn't have treated you so. I won't again. But it amused me.'

She laughed. But her laughter sounded unnatural.

'Flirt!' repeated Henry.

'Yes, I tell you,' she cried. 'Don't you hear? Don't you understand? I am sorry. But you'd better go away, Mr. Bartropps, or I may hurt you more. I am in the humour for mischief.'

'I don't understand you,' said he.

'I dare say not. You are not the only man who does not understand being laughed at.'

'You are very heartless,' said he.

'Of course. I was brought up to be.—Oh!'

How was it that the plate of buttered toast fell off the table?

'Why, Margaret!' said Miss Ovid, coming in.

'I believe I have cut my finger,' exclaimed Margaret.

And she burst into tears, and hurried out of the room.

'Aunt Margaret can't bear the sight of blood,' one of the little girls told her mother a few days later. 'Mr. Bartropps was there, and he broke a plate, and poor Aunt Margaret cut her finger, and she cried. Susan said it was the blood did it. Wasn't it funny?'

But it was not funny to Henry Bartropps, and he walked home, pondering over what had passed, miserable, and uncertain whether Margaret's strange behaviour veiled a liking or expressed an antipathy. He went to Ule again and again. But he never now found Margaret alone. Miss Ovid seemed to be always present, and if she withdrew herself for a moment, Margaret would take a child upon her lap. And her accents to Henry were polite and formal.

CHAPTER XVII.

'Now, Henry, what is the meaning of Margaret Jermine having set up a school?' inquired Cecily St. Roque.

It was late in February, and a chill, watery sunset was illumining the drawing-room of Mr. St. Roque's London house. Cecily was alone, and she had welcomed Henry gladly.

'I have a bad cold, and mamma has condemned me to stay in to-day,' she had said. 'I was just dying for some one to come in, and when the door opened, I was afraid it was Regie. I'm awfully glad it was you.'

'Thank you,' Henry had said.

Then Cecily had asked about Margaret's school.

'Well, yes, she has established a sort of school,' Henry admitted.

'But surely it's a very curious thing for a great heiress to do!' said Cecily.

'She doesn't make anything by it,' remarked Henry. 'The children pay for their board and their books. They don't even pay for the governesses. Miss Jermine pays all that, and declares she likes it.'

'She is so peculiar,' said Cecily.

'She is so over-conscientious,' said Henry. 'I wish some one could get her to see that Mr. Jermine's senseless mania is not to be a law to her.'

'I don't think any one will ever get her to see that,' said Cecily. 'I know Margaret pretty well, and so does mamma, and we both think she will live and die in her hermit fashion. Of course it is a pity. But it can't be helped.'

'But it must be helped.'

'Why? What does it matter to you or me?'

'Well, not much, perhaps. But I dislike to see a nice girl hampered by a nonsensical will.'

'Very kind of you, Henry. But don't you see that Margaret is one of those women who would rather die than sink below her own standard of right?'

'Yes. But standards change.'

'Hers will never change.'

'How do you know?'

'Because I do.'

'That is no answer, Cecily.'

'On the contrary, it is a very good answer. You can't explain intuition, and it is by intuition that I know Margaret.'

Then a brief silence ensued.

'Were you expecting Regie Dryad?' asked Henry, presently.

'Yes,' replied Cecily. 'I'm always expecting him, because he simply can't keep away. He's the greatest goose I know. I wonder he doesn't see that I'm about as likely to marry Mr. Pinington as to marry him.'

'My dear Cecily, may I ask why?'

'You may ask. But I decline to answer. My reasons are my own.'

'But surely you are not wise. Regie is the best fellow in the world.'

'So you have told me before, dear sir.'

'Then why don't you attend to what I say?'

'Thank you kindly. But I don't choose.'

'I can't think why you don't like Regie,' said Henry, in a vexed tone. 'There is absolutely nothing against him. You ought to like him, unless——'

'Well? Unless what?'

'I was going to say, unless you prefer some one else.'

'And if I do, what then, Henry?'

'Why, let me advise you, my dear girl. If you prefer some conventional idiot to a man of Regie Dryad's calibre, let me assure you, you make a great mistake. I speak merely in your own interests,—as an old friend. My dear Cecily, do let me persuade you!'

'My dear Henry, do you know that you pass the bounds even permitted by old friendship? No man has a right to say such things to a girl, unless——'

‘Well, Cecily?’

‘Unless he means to propose to her himself!’ said she, saucily.

‘Then I must cry *peccavi*,’ said he. ‘I can’t do that, Cecily. I have no mind to be refused.’

‘There is no doubt that I should refuse you,’ said she, with significance.

But he did not understand. He was thinking of Margaret, and it seemed to him that Cecily was joking. She was always versatile and amusing.

‘Of course you would,’ he said, prosaically.

For a few seconds Cecily was silent. She had staked high and she had not won; and she was bitterly disappointed. But Henry guessed nothing. To do him justice, although, until lately, he had not dreamed of the possibility of wooing in vain, it had never occurred to him that he might be the object of an affection he did not reciprocate.

‘I think here come mamma and Isabee,’ said Cecily, at last. ‘Isabee Ovid is staying with us.’

She was right. Mrs. St. Roque and Isabee entered the room, and behind them came Regie Dryad.

‘Oh, how do you do?’ said Cecily to the latter, giving him the tips of her fingers.

‘I wanted to know if you were better,’ said he.

‘No,’ she returned, perversely. ‘I’m not better. I’m very ill.’

‘Very ill!’ he exclaimed.

‘Nonsense,’ she snapped. ‘Pray don’t bother me! Sit down, and please make apposite remarks, or none.’

‘Have you been to Ule lately, Henry?’ asked Mrs. St. Roque.

‘I called there yesterday,’ replied he. ‘But it’s not much good going there now. What with twenty children and four governesses, one never seems to see Miss Jermine or Miss Ovid.’

‘Four governesses!’ echoed Mrs. St. Roque.

‘Yes. I don’t know what they do, for Miss Jermine seems to be teaching nearly all day herself. I should say she was simply killing herself with work. But she declares she likes it.’

‘Mamma says she is looking very well,’ said Mrs. St. Roque.

'And she doesn't work all day,' added Isabee. 'After half-past one, there are no more classes. Aurelia says she is the most able person she ever met.'

'Undoubtedly,' said Henry. 'But she leads a strange life. It strikes me as rather a pity. It is all very well to be kind to children. But, in point of fact, the doors of Ule are opened to no one else, and I regret it.'

'Cecily, I had another letter from my uncle last night,' Regie was murmuring.

'Had you, indeed?' replied Cecily, with indifference.

'Yes. He is so anxious that—— You know what I mean.'

'No, I don't. I know nothing about you, Regie, and what's more, I don't care.'

'Oh, Cecily, please don't say that.'

'But I must say it, since nothing will induce you to take a hint. Why don't you see that you are a nuisance to me?'

'I don't want to be a nuisance to you, Cecily, Heaven knows! But I want you to change your mind.'

'That I shall never do.'

'Then I shall never marry.'

'You can do as you like about that. But I don't feel very uneasy about you. I believe you said the same thing to mamma a few years ago.'

'When I was a boy, Cecily.'

'I dare say you've said it to twenty other girls, Regie.'

'Not to one. I have never loved any one but you.'

'How tedious you are, Regie! It would be so much more amusing if you were to vary your conversation a little.'

'Should you like me to say I don't care for you?'

'No. But for your own sake entirely. Because it would be rude. But there are a great many subjects in between. What's the good of being a poet, if you can only harp on one string?'

'But my one string is a string of transcendent beauty. It is Love,' he said.

'Bother love!'

'Oh, Cecily, don't say that.'

'Then leave off talking about it.'

'I can't. I shall never leave off talking about it till the proud day comes when I call you my own.'

'Which will never come, you foolish fellow!'

Then Lucius Cleve was announced. Mrs. St. Roque, Isabee, and Henry were still talking of Margaret and her school, and the new comer joined in the discussion.

'Will Miss Jermine's theory succeed do you think?' Mrs. St. Roque asked him.

'Will it succeed, Miss Ovid?' said Cleve, looking at Isabee.

'I can't say,' replied she. 'My uncle thinks it is a very interesting experiment.'

'I don't like it,' said Henry. 'It sounds to me like smattering.'

'It is not that,' said Isabee. 'Margaret's system is based on reason, and she teaches her pupils to trace the source of every fact,—be it the French revolution, or be it the escape of steam from the kettle's spout. All she refuses is to teach *mere* facts.'

'Then her pupils will fail in exactitude,' objected Henry.

'No. They learn arithmetic.'

'The girls will grow up odious,' said he. 'They will be horrid little blues, and refuse to have anything to do with us men.'

'Margaret thinks not,' said Isabee. 'She says education has never had that effect on men.'

'Certainly not,' said Cleve. 'In fact, I believe the higher education of women will promote marriage. The cleverer and more educated a woman is, the more companionable will men find her.'

Isabee coloured, as he looked at her.

'Don't you agree?' said he, in a low voice. '*You* have had every educational advantage.'

'I admire Margaret's scheme,' said she.

'And don't you think it will promote marriages?'

'She hopes so. Time only will prove.'

'I think she is most sagacious,' said he. 'Love is generally a wild catastrophe. She is going to make it a natural sequence.'

'Oh, my Minimy-my! I don't like it,' murmured Henry.

'What?' asked Mrs. St. Roque, vaguely.

'Miss Jermine's school.'

'Oh, my dearest Henry, why not?'

'It doesn't seem natural that a girl of her age should give herself up to such a thing.'

'Doesn't it? Big Adrian says it's very public spirited of her.'

'Exactly. That's what I complain of. Public spirit is not the quality one looks for in young ladies.'

'Perhaps not. But then, dear Margaret isn't at all like the usual run of young ladies.'

'No. That's what I think is a pity. I don't want her to be exactly like other girls. I admire her individuality. But I'm sorry she has oddities. Now Cecily has individuality. She is *piquante*.'

'But Margaret couldn't be *piquante*, my dear Henry.'

'Of course not. But she might be more conventional. Why doesn't she teach in the Sunday school, if she is so fond of children?'

'Oh my dear boy, how can I tell? She must do what she likes, you know.'

'But she oughtn't to do as she likes. She is Miss Jermine of Ule. She fills a great position. She represents an old family. She ought to take her place in society. Oh, my Minimy-my, I could use such strong language! Those children are the greatest bores imaginable. Why is she so wilful?'

'Well, I really can't say, Henry. You see, I'm very fond of her, and therefore——'

'Fond of her!' echoed Henry. 'Fond of her!'

He spoke with sad and earnest emphasis. Mrs. St. Roque laid her hand on his arm.

'Oh, my dear boy! my poor dear boy!' she said, with sympathy.

'Never mind,' he said, quickly. 'Don't betray me.'

'Oh, no, my dear boy! But be patient. Who knows what may happen?'

Then there was a slight pause. Clève was talking to Isabee and Regie to Cecily in tones that could not be overheard. Isabee looked content and happy. But Cecily seemed weary, and she yawned frequently.

'Why doesn't Cecily accept Regie?' asked Henry, suddenly. 'Shouldn't you like it?'

'Very much indeed. But big Adrian and I are determined to let our daughters please themselves.'

'It's absurd of Cecily,' said Henry. 'Regie is such a good fellow.'

'But if she doesn't like him, Henry?'

'She *ought* to like him,' said he. 'How perverse human nature is!'

'I suppose it is,' said Mrs. St. Roque, wrinkling her brow. 'But Big Adrian thinks it's rather a good thing. He says, if the course of true love had always run smooth there'd have been no novels and no plays.'

'I could dispense with the novels and plays,' said Henry. 'I should like my story to be,—he loved and married and lived happily ever afterwards.'

'My dear boy, perhaps that will be your story yet,' said Mrs. St. Roque, kindly. 'Do you know, big Adrian says that that year when he was paying me attentions, and when he used to be so miserable if I spoke to any one else, seems to him now like one long sunshiny day!'

'That is comforting, and you are very sweet, my Minimy-my!' said Henry.

Then he rose to go.

'You are not going to Bartropps immediately?' Cecily said to him, as he shook hands with her.

'I'm afraid I must. I have business,' he replied.

'Business! Nonsense! Stay and go with us to the Dandelions.'

'I'm afraid I can't. I'm sure Regie——'

'I don't want Regie.'

'I'm sorry, Cecily. But I *must* get back.'

And he left her pouting.

In truth, he had only come up to town because he was restless, and for the same reason, he hurried back. He could not be easy without seeing Margaret constantly, and, yet, every time that he saw her, he felt more and more disturbed. It seemed to him that she grew colder and more distant every day. Now she was never friendly. She would talk to him about the latest book or the last public event. But she would not speak of herself. She would not speak of her plans. She treated him like a stranger. He was not only heart-sick, but his pride was mortified. Had Margaret had other lovers, he could have coped with the occasion. He, Bartropps of Bartropps, felt that he could meet any rival in the fair field of love, and beat him. But

he was nonplussed by Margaret's frigidity, and he was constantly repulsed by the handful of ladies and children, with whom she had chosen to surround herself. He had never been gainsaid before, and it was a hard matter for him to endure this crossing of his will. But for the ardour of his love, he could not have endured it. But he loved Margaret well, and for his love's sake, he stifled his natural haughtiness and bore himself meekly, waiting his opportunity. It would come, he foresaw, in the summer. In the vastness of open-air life, Margaret must sometimes be alone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PARTY of ladies were gathered together at Bartropps on an afternoon just before Easter. The occasion was that of a Monthly Working Party, instituted by Mrs. Minimy, for the purpose of making clothes for heathen children. The members of the party were numerous, and varied in age. But to-day few had come, and no young people had yet arrived.

‘I am fully expecting Blanche,’ announced Mrs. Minimy. ‘But she has had Mrs. Primulum to lunch, and those two would talk about their husbands and children till midnight, if no one disturbed them. I must say I like to see young wives devoted. Is Bertha quite well, Mrs. Homer?’

‘Quite well, thank you,’ replied Mrs. Homer, smiling. ‘She and Ernest are with us for a few days. We are to have another wedding directly, Mrs. Minimy.’

‘Indeed!’ ejaculated Mrs. Minimy, with interest. ‘I thought Annie was to wait a year.’

‘Oh, it isn’t Annie,’ cried Mrs. Homer. ‘Of course, Annie must wait till John has been called to the bar. What do you think of Ellie?’

‘Ellie!’ exclaimed Mrs. Minimy. ‘Is it Mr. Start?’

The mother nodded assent.

‘She is to be married in August, the very moment the school breaks up,’ she said, triumphantly. ‘Reginald won’t wait a day, he says. Did you know his name was Reginald?’

‘Mr. Start is a very admirable master, I am told,’ said Mrs. Minimy. ‘He carries himself well. He must be five feet eleven, I should think.’

‘I don’t think poor Mrs. Hathe quite liked it,’ said Mrs. Homer, complacently. ‘She used to ask Reginald there about twice a week. She still asks Mr. Tally. But her manœuvring is of no good. The Hathes are *too* plain.’

'Their complexions are beyond everything,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'I have seen plain girls who were quite bearable. But the Hathes pass reason.'

'Yes, Ellie is plain,' said the mother. 'She's the middle daughter, and the only plain one of all my children. But, as you say, her complexion is good.'

'Louie Hathe is a nice creature,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'I'm often sorry for her. Her mother puts her quite to the blush. She tells me you've advised her to learn nursing, Mrs. Ife.'

'It was Margaret Jermine who suggested it,' said Mrs. Ife. 'Her suggestions are always good and always kind. My husband raves about her. He says, it's really a comfort to have one rational person in the neighbourhood to speak to. He and Margaret are the greatest friends.'

'I hope Margaret will not break down,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'I thought her looking just a trifle pale when I was at Ule the other day. She has a good deal of anxiety. It would make me dreadfully unhappy if she got to look old.'

'We think she is looking charming,' said Mrs. Ife. 'We see her two or three times a week.'

'She is immensely clever,' Mrs. Minimy went on. 'Did you hear about the stays? She was quite shocked to find some of the tots wore stays, the Ingrains, and little Mary Bell, and she printed a little book,—for private circulation only, of course—called *The Physiology of Corsets*, and Dr. Wheble said it was capital, and it was so forcible that all the mothers agreed to let Margaret dress the children as she liked. Margaret thinks with me that the figure ought to be scrupulously looked after.'

'I think her moral plans are even better,' said Mrs. Ife. 'If any child is quarrelsome or disobedient, he or she is sent home at the moment of conviction and not allowed to return till the following Monday. She arranged that with the parents, and hitherto it has answered very well. I never saw children more amenable.'

'Reginald Start says it is a capital system,' remarked Mrs. Homer. 'He says ostracism works much better than either flogging or impositions.'

'Dear Margaret has quite given my husband an interest in life,' said Mrs. Ife. 'You know, he used to be a famous hand at whist and billiards. Well, Margaret heard of it,

and she begged him to come regularly twice a week to teach the children. So we go to lunch every Tuesday and play billiards in the afternoon, and we go to dinner every Friday and play whist afterwards. Margaret put it very prettily. She said she wanted the children to learn games that required skill and memory.'

'She is a good girl,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'I only hope she won't go too far. I don't quite approve of the billiards. I don't like those extraordinary attitudes billiard-players put themselves into—tipping up on one foot and lying on the table, and perhaps holding a cue behind their backs. It doesn't seem to me it can be good for children who haven't done growing. I don't mind whist, if it doesn't make them sit up too late. Late hours are ruination. I always made Blanche go to bed early. And when she married I cautioned Adrian. I said to him, "Blanche is young and pretty—if you are kept at the House, don't let her sit up for you!"'

Then Cecily was announced. She came in, smiling.

'Dear Mrs. Minimy, I am quite out of breath,' she cried. 'I've run on ahead on purpose to tell you the news. Mamma and Mrs. Primulum will be here in five minutes.'

'What is it?' cried the three ladies.

They all left off sewing, and Mrs. Minimy hastily took off her spectacles and put her thimble on the table.

'I'll tell you in a minute,' said Cecily, roguishly. 'First I must congratulate Mrs. Homer about Ellie and Mr. Start. We were all so pleased. I suppose they will be married very soon. And what do the Hathes say?'

'Mrs. Hathe says Ellie is too young,' said Mrs. Homer.

'And what did you say to that, Mrs. Homer? Something very racy, I'll answer for it!' cried Cecily.

'No, my dear, I said nothing. I merely remarked that it was the penalty of having good-looking daughters that one couldn't expect them to stay at home to nurse their old parents. I can't help my girls being good-looking,' concluded the mother. 'Even Ellie—our plain one—even Ellie is pretty, compared to the poor Hathes.'

'But what is your news, Cecily?' asked Mrs. Ife.

'Isabee Ovid is engaged to Mr. Cleve,' said Cecily. 'It's nice news, isn't it? Papa and mamma think no end of Mr. Cleve, and of course every one loves Isabee. I'm just going on to Ule. Miss Ovid has gone to Gladestreet House

for a few days to play propriety, and I do so want to see Margaret.'

'I am extremely pleased,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'Isabee is a very pretty girl, and I'm sure she will make a sweet bride. It's a pity Mr. Cleve has that tendency to embonpoint. But I don't think he has any real defect, except his short sight. His hands are distinctly good, and his feet are quite passable. Yes. I have nothing to say against Mr. Cleve. But what do the Velvetines say?'

'Well, I don't know,' said Cecily. 'I expected to find them here, and to tell you the truth, I'm rather disappointed. I meant to have got such a rise out of poor old Flora.'

'You naughty, wild girl!' said Mrs. Minimy. 'You shouldn't be so unkind. Flora was pretty once.'

'Yes, once,' repeated Cecily. 'But was she never once nice. Now was she?'

'Well, I don't know that she was ever quite to my mind,' admitted Mrs. Minimy. 'I always foresaw that she'd get scraggly. But Blanche liked her.'

Then Mrs. St. Roque and Mrs. Primulum entered, and Cecily took her leave.

'All these engagements are exceedingly nice, aren't they?' said Mrs. St. Roque when the first greetings were over, and when Mrs. Homer and Mrs. Ife had slightly withdrawn. 'Big Adrian and I are particularly pleased about Isabee and Mr. Cleve. I only wish——'

'What, my dear?' asked her mother.

'Well, I should like a marriage from my own house,' said the stepmother. 'And then there is Margaret, in whom I take the deepest interest. I wish she would turn round. But I'm afraid, from what Isabee tells me, that she is quite inextricably involved in this educational scheme of hers.'

'We are going to send our girls to her,' said Mrs. Primulum. 'At first, papa wouldn't hear of it. He said, how could he tell whether a young woman like Miss Jermine knew anything about diet or exercise. So when we parted with poor Flora, we engaged Mademoiselle. We didn't much like her, because she screamed if she saw a cow, and then papa got in a fidget about her because she took to fainting, and he said she pinched, and taxed her with it, and she cried and said Monsieur was a savage, and I had as much as I could do to pacify her, and him too,—for he said firmly, no

one who pinched should teach his children. But at last I got him to say Mademoiselle should stay still Easter, and the very next day Mrs. Ingrain showed me Miss Jermine's tract on *The Physiology of Corsets*, and when I showed it to papa he was delighted, and said at last there was one sensible woman in Gladeshire. He went up to Ule at once, and ever since he and Miss Jermine have been the best of friends, and our girls are to go to Ule as soon as Miss Jermine can receive them.'

'Margaret is quite right to exercise herself about girls' figures,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'Of course, there may be a slight difference of opinion on the subject. Margaret's own figure is perfect. But without doubt, tight stays are the wickedest contrivances.'

'Papa is very strong about it,' said Mrs. Primulum. 'He can't be cordial to poor Mademoiselle, because of his suspicions. And she hates him, and one day actually dared to pity me for having such a terrible husband. She made me very angry. I believe papa is right.'

'Blanche, should you quite like that pimple on Mr. Start's face?' asked Mrs. Minimy, confidentially. 'I mean, if he were going to marry Cecily? You've noticed it, Mrs. Primulum? A small pimple, by the side of the left whisker,—almost hidden, in fact.'

'No, I've never noticed it,' said Mrs. Primulum.

'Nor I,' added Mrs. St. Roque.

'I wonder at that,' said Mrs. Minimy, reproachfully. 'There it is—a pimple—and almost under the left whisker. I've often felt sorry for Mr. Start.'

'You notice everything, mamma dear,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'I can't say I do.'

'No. You never noticed Tom Bayley's teeth,' said Mrs. Minimy, in a tone of gentle superiority. 'Nor did Margaret; till I pointed them out. More extraordinary still, Mrs. Bayley hadn't even noticed them. Now I think a child's appearance demands all the reasoning powers. It's worth hours of thought, because, if you neglect it now, you've lost it for ever. Later, you can't do anything. If you don't pinch a baby's nose, it may turn up, and if you don't see to a child's mouth, you may find it has developed tusks. Tom was rapidly developing tusks. The dentist said they must be removed without delay. I've persuaded Margaret to let

the dentist come once a month. It's only a proper precaution. Your husband agrees with me, Mrs. Primulum. 'Those who have the care of children must look into futurity. It's of such moment that people should be as handsome as possible. I always say,—Handsome does that handsome is. Because I'm sure people feel more comfortable, if they're good-looking. I always feel I might have been the meanest creature, if I'd been very plain, and perhaps, if I'd been an absolute beauty, I might have been heroic.'

'Dear mamma!' murmured Mrs. St. Roque.

'According to that, Flora Velvetine ought to be nicer,' remarked Mrs. Primulum. 'She certainly has some claim to good looks.'

'My dear, Flora Velvetine has grown less and less nice as she has grown less and less pretty,' said Mrs. Minimy, solemnly. 'She was rather a nice girl, and then she began to get lean. I saw it coming on. I saw the pretty plumpness subsiding, and soon after she jilted Mr. Cleve. The two processes were simultaneous. She deteriorated morally and physically at the same time. A plump, pretty girl is always good. I once knew a lady with high shoulders, and her husband had to sue for a judicial separation. She was a most disagreeable woman. She had an odd shaped head too, and ugly hands, with immense knuckles.'

'It's rather a dreadful idea,' said Mrs. St. Roque, plaintively. 'Suppose I were to get plain, mamma dear,—'

She was interrupted by the entrance of Flora.

'So you are all having a good gossip,' said the new comer, spitefully. 'I don't think a needle is going.'

'My dear, we all put down our work to shake hands with you,' said Mrs. Minimy.

'Have you heard the news?' asked Mrs. Homer.

'About Ellie's engagement?' said Flora. 'Yes, I should have called to congratulate you. But it's too far to walk, and Mr. Primulum never takes me for a drive now. He soon forgets old friends.'

'Yes, but the other news I meant,' said Mrs. Homer. 'There's another engagement you know.'

'Whose?' demanded Flora, sharply.

'Flora dear, come and sit here by me,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'Then we can have a quiet chat.'

'But who else is engaged, Mrs. Homer?' asked Flora.

'Some one you will be interested to hear of,' replied Mrs. Homer.

'Flora, do come here !' cried Mrs. St. Roque.

'Don't, Blanche,' said Flora, pettishly. 'I want to hear Mrs. Homer's news. It can't be Cecily and Regie Dryad?'

'No. Guess again.'

'Flora,—' began Mrs. St. Roque.

But Flora did not heed.

'Margaret Jerminé, I suppose,' said she. 'I've always expected it.'

'No.'

'Who, then?'

'Isabee Ovid and Mr. Lucius Cleve,' returned Mrs. Homer, in a matter-of-fact voice.

Flora laughed awkwardly.

'Indeed !' said she. 'Well, I wish them joy of each other. I know Lucius Cleve well, and I know that this is an affair of pique. If you knew what he said to me last summer ! But of course I remained firm. I didn't forget my lost love.'

'Well, Isabee is the gainer,' observed Mrs. Homer.

'I didn't allude to my juvenile flirtation with Lucius Cleve,' said Flora. 'Poor, tiresome boy ! He always bored me, and now he's elderly, I couldn't tolerate him for a moment. I gave him his *congé* directly, and, as you say, Isabee Ovid is the gainer, poor thing ! Well, I'm glad she's pleased. Of course, I was referring to dear Mr. Jerminé.'

'I wish, Flora dear, as you knew him so well, you could persuade Margaret that she needn't adhere to his instructions to the very letter,' said Mrs. St. Roque.

'Indeed, I shall do nothing of the sort,' said Flora, angrily. 'I never saw a worse conditioned girl than Margaret Jerminé. She has repulsed me twice, though I brought her up and was like a mother to her. I actually humiliated myself to go and offer to assist her with my experience, when I found she was resolved on her mad scheme of keeping a Kinder Garten. I did that, for her dear father's sake. And she flew into such a passion that I *shook*. I can't go again. My nerves won't stand it. The girl is intemperate to the last degree. I don't envy the unfortunate

children she's got hold of. She always was violent, and now she's in authority I expect she's ungovernable. I met Tom Bayley riding home on his pony the other day, crying as if his heart would break. So I stopped him, and the poor child said he'd gone up stairs in his dirty boots, and so he'd been sent home! I didn't like to ask, but I fully expect Margaret had boxed his ears with her own hand. Such a piece of tyranny!

'I don't think you quite know the rights of the story,' said Mrs. Ife. 'Tom was punished for an act of disobedience. All disobedience Margaret punishes in the same way, by sending the culprit away. It is her only punishment, and it seems to me to be a good one. For, though nothing is overlooked, it is seldom called into requisition. I also met Tom, and he owned he had only got his deserts. He was crying because he was in disgrace, and because he had vexed Aunt Margaret.'

'Aunt Margaret!' repeated Flora. 'What nonsense the whole thing is! It's like a very foolish novel, and I expect it will end as absurdly.'

'How?' asked Mrs. St. Roque. 'Novels end in so many different ways.'

'My impression is that the girl is mad,' Flora went on. 'She associates with no one but Dr. Wheble, and Mr. Primulum and Mr. Ife.'

'And Henry,' added Mrs. Minimy.

'Oh! yes,' sneered Flora, 'Henry may come. We all know what Margaret feels about Henry. It's quite unpleasant for me to see her with him. However, she may sigh in vain. Henry knows better. Wasn't he disgusted with her tract about stays, Mrs. Minimy?'

'I don't know, I didn't show it to him,' replied Mrs. Minimy. 'It wasn't quite a subject for a young man, I thought. It was about waists, you see.'

'Well, he read it,' said Flora. 'I took care to show it to him. I called him in one day on purpose. I saw him passing, and I tapped at the window, and while I went to fetch mamma, I said, "Have you seen this? I haven't looked at it!" And when I came back, he'd read it. I saw by his face he thought it the most indelicate thing in the world. But it was just like Margaret Jermine to write a book upon waists, and to put in drawings of skeletons. So

coarse, I call it! It makes me ashamed to own I brought her up.'

'Isabee is to be married in June,' observed Mrs. St. Roque. 'I wonder what poor Dr. Wheble will do then.'

'Do!' ejaculated Flora. 'Why, marry Margaret Jermine, of course. Mark my words. He's looking after Mis^s Jermine of Ule, and when Margaret finds she's lost Henry, she'll accept Dr. Wheble as a *pis-aller*.'

CHAPTER XIX.

CÆCILY found Margaret alone. It was Saturday, and her score of boys and girls had gone to their homes. Almost for the first time, no little guests had replaced them. It was Easter-time. Elder brothers and sisters were at home from larger schools, and Margaret would not break the family circles. Miss Ovid had gone home in a flutter of delight at her sister's engagement, and Margaret had sent the governess out driving.

Margaret had reserved the old schoolroom for her own use, and had transformed it into a charming boudoir, and to this quiet chamber she had retired early in the afternoon, desiring that tea should be brought to her there, and that no caller should be admitted, unless it should be one of the ladies from Beaulieu. She was at the piano when Cecily was ushered in.

'Don't stop, don't stop!' cried the latter, enthusiastically. 'I love to hear you. You are an angel, you know.'

Margaret laughed. She laughed oftener now.

'Dear Cecily, angels don't play upon the piano,' she said. 'No, no; I can play when I am by myself. I'm quite alone this afternoon, and I'm so glad you've come. And you only came home yesterday! You are indeed good.'

'But how is it you are alone?' asked Cecily. 'Tired of children, eh?'

'Oh no,' said Margaret smiling.

'Miss Ovid has run away to look after Cupid, I hear. I saw Isabee this morning.'

'Ah, then you know her news?'

'Yes, I'm awfully glad.'

'So am I—that is, I am glad Isabee is so happy. But I don't know Mr. Cleve. Is he really worthy?'

‘How like you to ask that, Margaret! Any one else would have said, “Is he really nice?”’

‘Well, is he really nice?’ said Margaret.

‘Rattling,’ replied Cecily. ‘Papa thinks he’s about as nice a fellow as he knows, bar two or three. Papa is rather fond of young men. He’s awfully fond of Regie, which is rather a nuisance. I don’t mind his being fond of Henry. Henry knows how to behave. But Regie goes on in such a way that I believe people think I’m engaged to him. It’s a bore!’

‘Yes,’ said Margaret, feeling it incumbent upon her to say something.

‘Of course, he may some day prove useful,’ proceeded Cecily. ‘He might do for a *pis-aller*. I might, of course, do worse. He’s good-looking and rich, and what’s still more to the point, he is perfectly devoted to me. I shouldn’t like to give him his *cong  * altogether, in case of accidents. But I don’t *want* to marry a *pis-aller*. What do you think, Margaret? Would you rather marry a man who didn’t care for you, but whom you cared for awfully, or a man who cared awfully for you, and whom you only liked in a sort of a kind of a way?’

‘I can’t fancy marrying any one whom one didn’t love supremely,’ said Margaret, seriously.

‘My! how grandiloquent you   re!’ cried Cecily. ‘You always make me vulgar, you stately queen! I’m always vulgar when other people are on stilts. Well, we mean the same thing,—only you say it in poetry, and I say it in prose. I can’t think why in the name of fortune you and Regie haven’t taken to each other! You’re just as poetical as he is. He’s the sort of man who loves supremely. Now there’s no fine stuff about me. I can’t pick out splendid phrases and live up to them. I just love awfully, and that’s all about it.’ That’s a very expressive word, Margaret,’ she went on, almost passionately. ‘It *is* an awful thing to love. If I hadn’t the pluck of Boadicea, it would have killed me. But, thank the gods! I’m made of good metal. I can love and not tell. Now I don’t believe you could, Margaret. I believe you’d die,—that is, if it came to nothing.’

‘You see, love is not a thing which concerns me at all,’ said Margaret. ‘I was born without it, and I am destined to live without it.’

'Well, you may be glad,' said Cecily, with a little sigh. 'As I told you, it's fiendishly painful.'

'That is what my father thought.'

'He was about right,' said Cecily. 'Only I disagree with him in thinking it's too painful to be encountered. After all, one moment of bliss would counter-balance whole years of suffering and wretchedness.'

'Would it?' said Margaret.

'To be sure! I know what I should feel if my beloved said he cared for me. I should forget all my misery at once. He wouldn't give me as much as I give him. He couldn't do that. But if he gave me the smallest scrap of liking, I should be as happy as a princess. Oh, Margaret, you don't know the ecstasy of even thinking of such a possibility! It's only a possibility. But it may come. Yes, it may come,' cried the girl, excitedly. 'And if I wait for years, still it is worth waiting for. He is perfect. He is like a great splendid king. He is *magnificent*. And I love him. Oh, Margaret, I love him *awfully*!'

The girl was transported by the vividness of her feelings. Her eyes were limpid with tears. Her whole frame was quivering.

'Cecily, darling, you oughtn't to say such things to any one!' cried Margaret.

Cecily laughed.

'Oh, it's only to *you*!' she said. 'Talking to you is like talking to a Sister of Charity. *You* aren't passionate. *You* don't want to tell your own tale and have my sympathy in return. You are the real, true

' " Pensive nun, devout and pure,
Sober, steadfast, and demure."

You feel like a nun, don't you?'

'I don't know,' said Margaret.

'I feel I can say anything to you,' continued Cecily, leaning back. 'You know, Margaret, it's a desperate thing to be in love. In love! I used to think it rather a rotten expression. But I see what it means now. One really is *in* love, because the thought is always there. It's a grind, you know, because one never can forget, and so one is never *quite* happy. But I like it—rather.'

Margaret did not reply.

'I dare say you can guess who it is,' said Cecily. 'Can't you?'

'I don't know.'

'He's the nicest man in all the world,' said Cecily. 'The only bad part about it is, that I'm afraid he doesn't care a fiddle-string for me. That's why I asked you whether it was nicer to marry a man who loved you, or a man whom you loved.'

'Indeed, I can't help you,' said Margaret. 'Every one is different, and I suppose every woman must do what she thinks right.'

'Well, I think I shall wait and see,' said Cecily. 'You know, Margaret, I'm not very romantic. But once, when I was a child, some one told me a story of a beggar-maid who loved a great prince. The prince didn't see it, of course. But the poor girl was happy, because once the prince went by, and while he paused for a moment, she kissed his shadow on the wall. Now I haven't quite come to kissing shadows, you may suppose. But I feel this. If he kissed me once,—even by accident, or in some moment of excitement,—I could die content, even if he married some one else the next day. I should have had my day, you know.'

'I don't think you would be satisfied,' said Margaret.

'Shouldn't I? Well, let's hope I sha'n't be tried. Let's hope I shall be his wife some day. Even if he doesn't love me much, I can lump it. I should be with him always, anyhow.'

'I don't think I should like that,' said Margaret, with energy. 'In fact, I know I couldn't bear it. Take care, Cecily!'

'My dear girl, you say that because you know nothing about love,' said Cecily. 'You are not in love, and you never have been, and you never will be. And you are naturally calm and unimpassioned, and you don't know what it is to long for a thing with your whole heart. Now I do, and I tell you I'd rather be his wife and have only a little of his love, than be nothing to him at all. And what's more, I shall never give up trying to win him, till I have won him. I know what's for my own happiness, and I mean to strain every nerve till I get it.'

'Take care,' repeated Margaret.

'Oh, I'll take care,' said Cecily. 'Don't you want to know who he is?'

'No.'

'Don't you really?'

'No. I'd rather not.'

'Why?'

'Because I think these things are secrets which no woman ought to divulge to any one else.'

'That is a matter about which I think any woman may please herself,' said Cecily, coldly.

She got up and walked to the window. Margaret did not immediately follow her. Neither did she speak. She was wounded by Cecily's flippant remarks. She smarted under the light assertion that she knew nothing of love. Her pulses had throbbed in response to Cecily's nimble discourse. Yet nothing that Cecily's glib tongue had uttered had paralleled the passion within her own heart. She felt that Cecily's love was weak and shallow compared to her own, and her breast swelled in indignant silence. She did not know that it is ever thus with Love, the ungauged. To each one, it is he only who truly loves.

After a time, however, her countenance cleared, and she perceived that Cecily's misapprehension was perhaps caused by her own reticence. Then she crossed the room and laid her hand on Cecily's shoulder.

'Don't let us quarrel, dear, because I didn't ask the name of this gentleman,' said she. 'Do tell me.'

'What's the good?' asked Cecily, crossly. 'Perhaps you don't know him.'

Her expansiveness had vanished. Cecily's moods were many. A few moments before, her heart had been laid bare. Now it was locked fast.

'Don't I know him?' said Margaret.

She was surprised. She had supposed that she knew.

'Well, you don't know all the men I know,' said Cecily. 'I know scores of men in London.'

'Yes, yes,' admitted Margaret, humbly.

'You thought it was Henry,' Cecily went on. 'Now I might as well fling myself at Mont Blanc as have a try at him. I'm not quite such a fool as I look, my dear.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Margaret.

'Oh, it doesn't matter,' cried Cecily, brightening suddenly.

'I didn't mean to be cross, Margaret. I know I'm a ruffian sometimes. I can't help it. You must bear with me, because my heart aches. Kiss me, Margaret dear, kiss me! I *should* like to be dignified and mild and self-contained and passionless like you, and perhaps, if you kiss me enough, I shall catch some of it.'

She threw her arms around her friend, and Margaret returned the caress warmly. The daughter of Charles Jerminé would have died sooner than reveal that it wounded her to the quick to be called mild and passionless.

'Are you never going to marry?' asked Cecily, presently.

'My dear Cecily, let us talk of something else,' said Margaret. 'We have talked enough about marrying for to-day.'

'No, we haven't,' contradicted Cecily. 'It's an awfully interesting subject,—particularly just now, because of Isabee. Are you really never going to marry?'

'Never.'

'Then what shall you do?'

'Educate children.'

'Blessed imps!' cried Cecily. 'The men will be ready to cut their throats.'

Margaret smiled.

'The kids won't satisfy you always,' proceeded Cecily.

'I am not changeable,' said Margaret.

'You're a dear!' cried Cecily. 'Papa says you're doing a fine work, and I admire you, though I couldn't do it myself. I like children well enough. But it would bore me to be always with them. I like a nursery in the background, and a nurse just outside the door, and then the moment the youngsters get troublesome, I say, "Off you go, my cherubs!" But now, Margaret, why I asked you so particularly about marrying is this: People say you are going to marry dear old Dr. Whittle, and I think you ought——'

'What!' interrupted Margaret, starting up. 'Who dares gossip about me? Who ventured to say such a thing? Who has been impertinent enough? Who has had the insolence to spread such a report? Who——'

'Oh my!' exclaimed Cecily.

And she began to laugh.

'How heroics do suit you!' she said. 'Do it again, dear! Do it again!'

'I beg your pardon,' said Margaret, still speaking with warmth. 'Of course I oughtn't to feel so angry. But who did say it, Cecily?'

'Oh, that I really can't tell you,' replied Cecily. 'That's to say, I can't say who originated it. I've heard it said once or twice, and I thought you ought to know.'

'Yes. I'm glad you told me. To-morrow I shall ask Dr. Wheble to come and live here—with Miss Ovid and me—as soon as Isabee is married.'

'Margaret, I think people are right. You are awfully eccentric.'

'Yes,' said Margaret. 'Is that another thing my kind neighbours say about me? I didn't know I was a person of such importance. Pray, have they said anything else?'

'Oh yes, of course! But never mind.'

'What?'

'Never mind, I say!'

'But I wish extremely to know. I must beg you to tell me, Cecily.'

'Margaret, I believe you could love, after all,' exclaimed Cecily, suddenly.

'Nonsense! What do you mean? Why do you change your opinion?'

'Because you can be so angry, my dear, and people who can be angry can always love. You're awfully nice in anger, Margaret! You look as handsome as I don't know what. Yes. You could love,' she concluded. 'You could consume yourself with love. Take care!'

Margaret resumed her seat and covered her face with her hands. For several seconds, the silence remained unbroken. Cecily looked curiously at her companion.

'I think, if she loved, it would kill her,' she thought.

Then Margaret looked up. The bright colour had faded from her cheeks, and tears were in her eyes.

'Dear Cecily, I can't think what has been the matter with me this afternoon,' she said. 'I'm not generally so ill-tempered. Please forgive me!'

'Forgive you! Why, it was all my fault,' cried Cecily.

Then the two girls kissed again.

'It's nice to be women,' said Cecily, sighing. 'Don't take away your hand, dear. I like to hold it. Women kiss and make up. Men just shake hands, if they've had words.'

I suppose it answers their purpose. But *I* shouldn't like it.'

'Now I'm quite calm, do tell me all the gossip, Cecily,' begged Margaret. 'I can bear it with perfect equanimity, I assure you. I can't think why I was so annoyed just then. When I was a little girl, I used to be very passionate, and the volcano smoulders still, and every now and then the flame bursts out when I least expect it. But now I know there's an eruption imminent, I can ward it off. Go on, dear. Now I'm calm, it amuses me to think people should say such things of dear Dr. Wheble.'

'Yes. It was too bad,' said Cecily. 'She implied it was because you were an heiress.'

'She!'

'Yes. Old Flora.'

'I thought as much. What a pity I was so angry! No one heeds what she says.'

'Oh dear no!'

'You heard that she came and offered to be one of my governesses?'

'Yes. I thought it was awful cheek.'

'It surprised me rather. She never taught me anything but needlework. Mr. Pinington taught me everything know, except music. I was obliged to say I had made other arrangements.'

'*She* says you flew into an awful rage and stamped your foot.'

'Oh no, Cecily! I believe I said, "Thank you very much. But I have already engaged the staff I require."'

'Flora is odious,' said Cecily. 'I'm awfully glad Mr. Cleve is engaged. I expect it's a bitter pill for the poor old thing.'

'You shouldn't be spiteful, Cecily.'

'I'm not, dear. It's poetical justice, and I learn that from Regie. I can't help being glad. We were little girls and knew nothing. But every one says she broke off her engagement most heartlessly. She thought your father was going to marry her, you know. She tells every one she was half-engaged to him.'

'Now, Cecily, you shouldn't tell me mischief-making things. I don't care to hear about Miss Velvetine. What do nice people say of me?'

'Well, Margaret, since you are so pressing, nice people say you are rather queer. They are a trifle offended because you prefer children to grown-up people, and they say you keep odd company.'

'What do they mean? I see hardly any one but Mrs. Minimy and Dr. Wheble and Isabee, and Mr. and Mrs. Ife.'

'That's just the point. Don't you see, Mr. Ife is a disreputable man who is never sober, and whom all the rest of the county has cut for years?'

'He is always sober when he comes here,' said Margaret.

'But how can you like him?' demanded Cecily.

'One likes people for different reasons,' returned Margaret.

'Is it true that you told Mr. Ife you wished he was dead, Margaret?'

'Not exactly.'

'That's the story that is going about, my dear.'

'Mr. Ife told Dr. Wheble himself,' said Margaret. 'So, as he has mentioned it, I will tell you what really happened. One day last autumn, I went to call at Red Oaks, and Mr. Ife came in, and he began to talk about drinking, as you know he is fond of doing, and he told me of a man on his estate who drank fearfully. So I said, "I hope he will soon die." Mr. Ife stared and said, "What did you say?" I repeated, "I hope he will soon die. I always hope that the life of a confirmed drunkard may not be prolonged."—"Then you wish for my death?" he said. "Yes, I do, if you cannot cure yourself," I replied.'

'Good gracious! Margaret, how could you?' cried Cecily.

'Well, Mr. Ife looked quite paralysed. He said nothing more then. But after a little time, he asked me to come out and see the dahlias, and when we were alone, he asked me what I had meant, and I told him plainly what I thought.'

'And what do you think?'

'I consider drinking a disease,' said Margaret. 'But I consider it an avoidable disease. It is distinctly a disease that can be warded off, and so I told Mr. Ife. I told him he might throw away the key of his cellar, and that he might hem himself in by never going out alone, and never having money in his pocket. He looked amazed, and he said

again, "So you'd like to see me dead?" I was greatly touched. But I stood firm and said, "Yes, if you can't cure yourself of this disease, if it is really ineradicable, I would sooner see you laid in your grave in peace, than living on to be a bad example to the ignorant and a source of grief to your wife." We had a good deal of conversation, and then, by a sudden inspiration, I said, "Will you teach me to play billiards?" Now he comes to see me regularly twice a week, and Mrs. Ife is getting quite cheerful.'

'And Dr. Wheble says you are the best physician he knows,' said Cecily. 'I didn't know what he meant before. Well, Queen Margaret, you certainly are going to reform Gladeshire!'

'I shall certainly continue to cultivate Mr. Ife's acquaintance,' said Margaret. 'But now you know the truth about that intimacy, what next?'

'Nothing more,' returned Cecily. 'Oh, by the way, why did you write *The Physiology of Corsets*?'

'Because I thought such a manual was needed.'

'Some people thought it was improper of you.'

'Oh, I don't care about that,' said Margaret. 'Miss Ovid approved.'

'Henry thought it was a pity,' proceeded Cecily. 'Of course, he didn't say so to me. But he spoke of it to mamma, and said he regretted that you should come before the public in such a strong-minded way. He said it was all very well for middle-aged spinsters or married women to preach about reforms in dress, and things like that. But he doesn't think it at all *comme il faut* for a young woman. Altogether, he thinks it a pity you are so strong-minded, Margaret.'

Margaret drew away her hand and pushed her chair a little further off.

'Strong-minded!' she repeated.

'Yes. He thinks you are strong-minded, because you don't ask advice, and you do such odd things. He says it's awfully peculiar of you to shut yourself up here with a gang of ladies and children. Then he says you're strong-minded about religion. You hardly ever go to church, you see, and he thinks people ought to go to church. He says it doesn't matter two straws what you think or believe, but you ought to be outwardly orthodox. And he thinks women ought to be

really orthodox, unless they happen to marry unorthodox men, and then they ought to think what their husbands think. And he says——'

'In fact, he is very old-fashioned, and he ought to have lived fifty years sooner,' said Margaret. 'I am sorry I displease him. But I can't help it.'

'You are sorry you displease him? I thought you didn't care what people said of you,' cried Cecily.

Margaret did not speak.

'How odd you are!' Cecily went on. 'You don't care that the whole county thinks you a lunatic, and yet you are sorry because one foolish young man disapproves of your trying to reform children's dress and not going to church. Why do you mind displeasing Henry?'

'I don't know. It is a *façon de parler* to say one is sorry.'

'It is a *façon de parler* you didn't use when I told you the whole county thinks you cracked!'

'Do people think so? I am surprised, then, that so many of them are willing to place their children under my care.'

'That's because you know so little of the world, my dear. Most people are worldly-wise, and your sagacious neighbours know that your lunacy is quite harmless, and doesn't prevent your being a tremendous dab at teaching, and having a beautiful airy house and a good cook, and ponies. So they swallow the eccentricity, because of the benefits. You see, the upper story may be affected in two different ways. One set of lunatics rush about stabbing their fellow-creatures. The other set only hurt themselves and look silly.'

'And do I belong to the latter set, Cecily?'

'To be sure, my dear! Every one says it is the maddest and stupidest thing in the world's history for a clever, beautiful girl to shut herself up and keep a school and refuse to marry, just because of an unpardonably preposterous will. But it doesn't hurt any one else, you see, and so they let you amuse yourself with their kids and welcome.'

'They are all very kind,' said Margaret. 'But I think I would rather not hear any more things that are said behind my back. It gives me a low opinion of human nature. If people really think me insane and stupid, it is wrong of them to entrust their children to my care. And if Henry Bartropps disapproves so highly of my conduct, I think it is not right of him to come here so often.'

'Good gracious, Margaret, how you do fly out !' exclaimed Cecily.

'We will have some tea,' said Margaret, rising, and going towards the bell. 'You see, it seems as if I couldn't help being cross to-day. I dare say my kind friends are right. My rather peculiar bringing-up has made me different from other young people, and perhaps that is why I get on better with children than with people of my own age. I dare say I am mad and stupid. If orthodoxy and conventionality mean sanity and wisdom, I certainly am. But I don't care.'

'Except when you displease Henry,' said Cecily, mischievously.

'Cecily, I must beg you never to say such a thing again !' exclaimed Margaret. 'I cannot endure to have such things said, and I will not hear them. If I am to be considered mad and stupid because I am, not exactly like other girls, at least let me have the advantages of my position, and spare me these senseless jokes.'

'I was only chaffing,' said Cecily.

'I dare say. But will you remember that such jokes are utterly distasteful to me. I hope I am not rude. But will you remember ?'

'Yes, my beautiful creature, I will,' returned Cecily. 'I'll never chaff you again, Margaret, though I must say it's a temptation, because you look so fine when you're in a temper. Never mind. I won't— Oh, there's Henry coming to the front-door ! I'll call him up here, shall I ?'

Before Margaret could stop her, she threw open the window and looked out.

'Henry !' she called out. 'Margaret and I are up here—in the old school-room. Come up !'

'Oh, Cecily !' said Margaret, coming to the window. 'How do you do, Mr. Bartropps ? We will come down to you in the drawing-room.'

'Nay, let me come up,' he said. 'Why should I trouble you ? I know the way.'

'You shouldn't have called to him, dear,' said Margaret, reproachfully.

'My dear, I did it on purpose,' said Cecily. 'I had a suspicion you'd told the servants to say you were out to every one but me, and I thought Henry would do us good. We've been awfully feminine this afternoon, Margaret,

quarrelling and contradicting each other and getting red in the face, and ready to tear each other's eyes out——'

'My dear Cecily!' expostulated Margaret.

'Well, I speak for myself,' said Cecily. 'I've felt ready to shake you into little bits more than once. Never mind. It's all over now, and we've got a third person, and the masculine element may set us to-rights. Come in, come in!' she cried, as Henry tapped at the door.

'How do you do?' said Margaret, without smiling.

'How do you do,' said Henry. 'I haven't been in this room for years,' he added.

'No. Not since the day before you went to Eton—after I had been ill,' said Margaret.

Then she blushed vividly. The moment she had spoken she bethought her that she should not have owned to remembering so much.

'What a good memory you have!' remarked Cecily.

'My life has been marked by so few social events,' said Margaret. 'After Mr. Bartropps went to school, I never had another playfellow.'

'Why do you call Henry Mr. Bartropps?' asked Cecily. 'It's humbug.'

'I prefer it,' said Margaret, coldly.

'You are such an odd girl,' said Cecily. 'Isn't she odd, Henry?'

'Come, Cecily, I thought we had agreed we would talk of something else,' said Margaret. 'Let me give you some tea.'

'We've been talking about Margaret all the afternoon,' said Cecily. 'I've been telling her how she impresses Gladeshire.'

'Shall I retaliate for you, Miss Jermine?' said Henry. 'Shall I tell you how Cecily impresses Gladeshire? Only this afternoon I have been told that she is——'

'No, no,' cried Cecily. 'Stop him, Margaret! Don't let him say anything horrid. I only told you that people said you were unorthodox and unconventional. I never told you anything horrid.'

'But how do you know Mr. Bartropps was going to tell you anything horrid?' asked Margaret.

'Oh, I have a feeling he was! Now, weren't you, Henry? I believe you were going to say that Regie Dryad calls me

a heartless flirt. Not that I care a pin what Regie says or thinks !'

'Well, you must confess you behave very ill to Regie,' said Henry, argumentatively.

'I don't. Now do I, Margaret?'

'I don't know,' said Margaret.

'I've told him honestly I don't care for him,' said Cecily. 'If he will hang about me after that, it isn't my fault. No woman can do more than tell a man she doesn't reciprocate his tender feelings. Can she, Margaret?'

'I suppose not,' said Margaret.

She wished that Cecily would talk of something else. Opinions differ, and it seemed to the author of *The Physiology of Corsets* that there was a species of indelicacy in discussing this subject in the presence of a young and unmarried man. But she was too inexperienced to turn the conversation into another channel. She was far more learned and thoughtful than either of her companions. But she was as unversed in social tactics as a child. The world was still strange to her. She had grown up in solitude, and her intuition of what was seemingly greater than her power to overrule circumstances.

'You see, if Regie will be an owl, I can't help it,' proceeded Cecily. 'I don't think it's at all nice of you to say such things, Henry.'

'But I said nothing,' said Henry, laughing.

'No. But I know what you meant.'

'That was your conscience then,' said he.

'No, indeed! My conscience is very easy as regards Regie.'

'I am sorry you are not more sensible,' said Henry.

'You are sorry!' cried Cecily, with scorn. 'What do you know about it, pray? I tell you the world is a wilderness; and my unrequited heart is a mere empty husk. If I gave it to Regie, what good would it do him?'

'For whom do you indulge an unrequited affection, Cecily?' asked Henry, with curiosity.

'That is a secret,' replied she.

'Which Miss Jermine, of course, knows?'

'Which Miss Jermine does *not* know, sir! Nobody knows. I can keep my heart to myself, thank you.'

'But apparently——' began Henry.

But Margaret interposed.

'Don't you think it is waste of time to try and guess an enigma of which the solution is not even promised?' she said. 'Tell us some news instead, Mr. Bartrop's.'

'I don't think there is any news,' returned he. 'You know about Start and Ellie Homer, I suppose? and of course you know all about Isabee Ovid's engagement?'

'Do you like Mr. Cleve?' asked Margaret.

'Yes,' replied Henry. 'He is a thoroughly good fellow. He was once engaged to Velvetine, you know,' he added, smiling.

'I know. It's the one thing I'm sorry about.'

'Why are you sorry?' demanded Cecily. 'What does it matter? No one marries their first love. Do they, Henry?'

'Not always,' said he.

The conversation had again and immediately assumed the complexion that displeased Margaret.

'I wish——,' she began.

Then she hesitated.

'How worried you look!' cried Cecily. 'What's the matter with you, Margaret?'

'Miss Jermine is tired of your chatter, Cecily,' said Henry, with good-natured irony. 'Suppose you hold your tongue for five minutes and let us talk!'

Cecily reddened.

'Bear!' she ejaculated.

'Shall I play to you?' said Margaret, abruptly.

Cecily laughed.

'What a transparent artifice!' she said. 'As if we couldn't see through and through your little dodge! However, go and play. When you have done, we will select a theme better suited to the Queen Pedagogue. Shall it be the last Latin Grammar, or the latest five-finger exercises?'

'Or the best bridle for somebody's tongue, eh?' added Henry, following Margaret across the room.

Margaret began to play without further question, and Henry sat near her, gazing at her, full of love and of longing and of determination. And as she played, he matured his plans and resolved that not many hours should elapse ere he spoke and told his tale of love.

'Thank you,' he said, when she ceased.

Cecily had taken up a book. The whole room divided her from the two at the piano.

'What do you think your music made me think of?' said Henry, in a low tone.

'I don't know,' returned Margaret.

'What did it make *you* think of?' he asked.

'I cannot tell you. Of many things.'

'Bright, glad things—were they?'

'Nay. My thoughts were sad.'

'Sad! But not all sad?'

'Not all sad. They were like the things in Pandora's box,—pain, with Hope at the bottom.'

'Mine were hopeful too,' he said, looking steadily at her. 'Your music made me think of sweet and happy days to come,—won with pain, perhaps, but won at last.'

She was silent.

'May I hope such hopes?' he said, softly.

'How can I tell?' she replied. 'I hope only for the little ones whom I love. I don't know what you hope for.'

'I hope for myself and one other,' he said.

Again she was silent.

'If I said I wooed Fame, what would you say?' he asked.

'Hope,' she returned, gravely.

'And if I said I wooed Happiness?'

'Hope,' she repeated.

'And if I said I wooed *Love*?'

For a moment there was a pause. Then she looked at him fixedly.

'How can I say?' she said. 'Do you not know that Love and I have nothing to do with each other?'

Then she rose and went swiftly across the room.

'What are you reading, dear?' she said to Cecily.

'I ~~must~~ go home,' said Cecily, beginning to button her gloves.

'Mr. Bartropps will escort you,' said Margaret.

'Certainly,' said Henry.

Then he held Margaret's hand for a moment, looking at her. And she cast down her eyes, blushing, and he went away, with hopes and fears tearing at his heart.

For a little time neither he nor Cecily spoke. Then she began.

'Henry!' she said.

'Yes,' replied he.

'Why are you silent, sir?'

'I was waiting for you to make a remark.'

'Nonsense! You were thinking of Margaret.'

'Very well. I never contradict a lady.'

'But you *were* thinking of Margaret?'

'Yes. I said I never contradicted a lady.'

Cecily pouted.

'You are *horrid*!' she cried, with energy. 'Why do you talk to me as if I were a child? Why do you say things to me you wouldn't say to Margaret? Why did you say I chattered? You have been rude and disagreeable. Why are you so horrid to me?'

'What an outburst!' said Henry. 'I'm sorry I've offended you, my dear. How can I get myself back into your good books?'

'Why don't you treat me nicely?—like you treat Margaret?' said she.

'I hope I do treat you nicely.'

'Indeed you were very rude to me this afternoon.'

'Then you must forgive me. It was unintentional.'

'You are so foolish,' said Cecily, inconsequently. 'Why do you hover round Margaret?'

'I don't.'

'You do! You hover round Margaret, just like Regie hovers round me. Both of you are equally absurd and insane.'

'Very well. As I have remarked before, I can't contradict you. But let us change the conversation.'

'Why? Why won't you talk about Margaret?'

'I will talk of her. But not of her and myself.'

'Why not?'

'How persistent you are, my dear child! If you must know, because I don't care to hear the name of any lady whom I honour coupled with that of any man—even myself.'

'Oh!' said Cecily.

Then they walked a few paces without speaking.

'Henry, I've quite made up my mind to be an old maid,' said Cecily, suddenly.

'Have you?' said he.

'Yes. So you won't ever bother me again about Regie, will you?'

'Oh, I can't promise, my dear. You are too young to take a vow of celibacy.'

'But I really mean it, Henry.'

'Do you?' said he. 'Why? What did you mean just now by saying your heart was unrequited?'

'That's a secret.'

'Cecily, if you have given your heart to some undeserving fellow who has trifled with you, I sha'n't easily get over it,' said Henry, seriously.

'You are very kind,' said she.

'But have you, my dear?'

'I can't say more than I have said, Henry.'

'I'd kill the fellow!' said he, angrily.

'No. You wouldn't.'

'I beg your pardon. I would willingly. The man who doesn't return your favours deserves a good thrashing.'

'Oh no, Henry! Not this one.'

'He does,' said Henry, vindictively.

'Oh no, no!'

'Well, take care I don't come across him. If I find him out, he'll be sorry, I can tell him.'

'He's a delightful man,' said Cecily, sighing.

'Nonsense! Who is he?' demanded Henry.

But she shook her head.

'That's my one and only secret,' she said.

'And is it this wretched idiot who prevents your liking Regie?' said Henry.

'I suppose so. But he is by no means a wretched idiot.'

'But you aren't really going to forswear marriage, my dear Cecily?'

'Really. Unless *you* ever propose to me?' she said, merrily.

'You make fun of everything,' said Henry, laughing.

'But let me tell you, you play rather a dangerous game, Cecily. You're too pretty to say such things. Heaps of men would have taken you at your word and proposed to you on the spot.'

'I dare say,' said Cecily, archly.

'It's a good thing it was I you were talking to,' he went on.

'Of course. I shouldn't have said what I did to any one else.'

'I hope not, my dear.'

'Of course not.'

'You are so giddy, Cecily. You must excuse my speaking plainly. I feel like your elder brother, you know. You really should be more discreet.'

'Yes, brother,' said Cecily.

And she laughed gaily.

But that night she did not come down to dinner, pleading a bad headache.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next day at breakfast Henry made an unprecedented announcement.

'I'm not going to church this morning,' he said to Mrs. Minimy. 'I have something I rather want to do. You don't mind going without me, I hope?' he added, kindly.

'O no,' replied Mrs. Minimy. 'But, my dear boy, aren't you well?'

'Quite, thank you,' he said, smiling. 'I have something I rather want to do. That's all.'

Mrs. Minimy said nothing further. For she had great tact. But Henry's unusual proceeding filled her with apprehension, and she did not enjoy the morning service.

'I own it fidgets me,' she whispered to Mrs. St. Roque, when the two ladies met at the conclusion of the service. 'Of course, I never ask questions. That's a rule of mine, as you know, Blanche, my dear. But I confess when Henry said he wasn't going to church, I felt quite nervous. Henry is so extremely particular. I've heard him say he'd sooner miss luncheon than church. Of course, I should contend that point with him, if it became necessary. Luncheon is essential. A young man like dear Henry can't keep well and strong and handsome, if he doesn't have proper meals. I should be obliged to put a firm foot on that. Men require a substantial diet, if they are to look as Henry looks. But there's no need to miss luncheon here, and Henry says it's the duty of a landlord to be seen in church on Sunday morning. I've heard him say it,—quite as if it were a creed. I do hope he isn't sickening for something. He has never had scarlet-fever.'

Henry, however, was not ill. He was simply putting into execution his resolve to throw his fortunes at Margaret's feet with as little delay as possible, and he knew that upon Sunday morning, Margaret would probably be strolling about the woods alone, and that he should be able to steal upon her unawares. *Omnia vincit amor*. The necessity of the suitor destroyed the landlord's creed.

The day was fine and warm. The east winds which had prevailed for many days, had given place to a soft south-west breeze. It seemed as if Spring had been born in the night.

Margaret, who had gone to bed in a melancholy frame of mind, arose scarcely more cheerful. Cecily's frank conversation of the day before had depressed her, and Henry's bold wooing had alarmed her. Truly, she thought scorn of the criticisms of a shrewd and sordid world, which worshipped convenience and easily accommodated itself to advantageous inconsistencies. But the criticisms stung her and wounded her sensitiveness nevertheless. And her whispered colloquy with Henry had disturbed her greatly. She had repelled him. But was not the burden of his heart, and of her own, revealed to her?

She determined that she would go forth alone and spend a morning in the woods, uninterrupted. Sadly, she thought that she would fulfil her father's strict injunctions. She would endeavour to derive all the pleasure of the hour from the contemplation of nature and from the cultivation of her intelligence. So she took a book from her shelves, and between its pages she placed her father's letter. She thought that it would fortify her natural weakness to re-peruse the instructions that had been written for her guidance. But when she had reached the seat by the lake, she did not immediately begin to read. For a long time she sat, with folded hands, passively enjoying the loveliness of the vernal day and allowing a desultory train of thoughts to pass idly through her brain. The light air played softly upon her face and her ungloved hands. Every now and then the breeze was faintly scented with the perfume of violets. Around her, the young bracken was beginning to uncurl itself. Above, the vivid greenery was thickening. At her feet lay the mere, white and dazzling in the bright sunshine. The wood was full of singing-birds. There was harmony and

beauty everywhere. Then Dash, the retriever, who had followed his mistress from the house, came and laid his nose upon her lap, and looked at her with sympathetic eyes. She patted his silky head.

‘Oh, Dash, I am no fit companion for you!’ she said.

Then Dash uttered a short bark, and trotted away. He thought of hunting.

‘Even Dash forsakes me,’ thought Margaret.

She was bitter, because of the public opinion which she despised. Cecily’s plain speaking had enlightened her, and she perceived that it was to Miss Jermine of Ule that people had confided their children, and that it was to the theories and ideas of the rich and liberal heiress that they had so willingly yielded. Would they have condoned the eccentricities at which they secretly sneered, if her purse had been narrow, and her place in the world insignificant?

A great piteousness gathered about her heart. It seemed to her that she was like a dead person, re-animated, but forbidden to consider himself one of the living. For did she not breathe, move, speak, like other people? And yet was she not altogether different from them? For Love is the heritage of all human beings, and she alone stood apart, shut out from her birthright. A great gulf separated her from the rest of mankind. Every other woman might give love and take it. She only must possess herself, in a barren and an empty solitude. She almost groaned. The aloofness of her position grieved her sore.

She was disturbed, moreover, that she should have disregarded her father’s injunctions and encouraged certain friendships and intimacies. Yet she knew that these friendships had been essential to her well-being. She felt that she could not have retained her sanity in solitude. And it was only in moments of deep depression, like the present, that the scrupulous misgivings of her tender conscience arose and smote her. But she had strayed beyond the limits of friendship. She had not been able to withstand the majesty of Love, and she was aware that she had answered his summons. She groaned again, suffering cruelly. For she who loved must deny her love, must reject her beloved, must spurn from her the tenderest delights of life. So far she could obey her father. She who loved need not indulge in the bliss of loving.

To fortify her resolve, she drew forth her father's letter and read it.

This was what Jermine had written several years before his death :—

‘My daughter,—When you read this, I—who write—shall have passed away from this world for ever. You will not grieve. I have provided against that affliction, for I have never suffered you to love me.

‘In the same drawer in which you find this letter, you will find my treatise *On the Erroneousness of Love*. I need not here dwell upon its contents. You will read it for yourself. Eventually, I hope you will publish it. It contains my final dictum, my *ipse dixit*, my new and perfect philosophy. That it will be a popular philosophy, I do not expect. That it will meet with opposition, with scorn and with ridicule, I anticipate. But I venture to hope that it will gradually—by however slow degrees—permeate society and assist man in the attainment of his highest good. His aim is happiness, and happiness can only be secured by the abandonment of the desire for Love, and by the cultivation, in its stead, of the intellect and of the enjoyment of Nature.

‘That my philosophy will ultimately be accepted, I do not doubt. It has but to be proved to be embraced, and he who has once tasted the bitterness of love will not deny my assertions. Like the emancipation of women, like the hideousness of insobriety, like the advantageousness of education, my philosophy needs only that public opinion should be on its side. Hitherto, a foolish public opinion has said—Love. But a time will surely come when a wise public opinion will say—Love not. And in that day my philosophy will have triumphed, and mankind will be blessed.

‘I say no more. You will read the treatise, and it is exhaustive. One question alone remains,—that of marriage. You will see that I have admitted its expediency. But it is a dangerous necessity, and when I deal with individuals, my verdict is unhalting. To you, I say imperatively—*Do not marry*.

‘Let me lay upon you five rules :—Be acquainted with few. Be intimate with none. Restrain your affections. Avoid communication with the opposite sex. Above all,

do not suffer yourself to be persuaded to marry. Remember also that you have promised to try and obey me. On the other hand,—Cultivate your understanding to the utmost of your power. Be absorbed in the contemplation of Nature. Let the pleasures of music, of scenery, and of learning, suffice you. That there is no other good, and that the pursuit of love is the pursuit of failure and of indescribable wretchedness, is the last word of him who gave you being.

‘CHARLES JERMINE.’

With a low cry, Margaret flung the letter from her, and it fluttered to a little distance. She had read it many times. But never before had it struck so coldly upon her, and never before had its irrationality been so forcibly impressed upon her. She felt convinced that her father’s untenable principles had been the result of mental derangement. Undoubtedly he had been insane when he had penned this strange epistle. Was she, therefore, bound to obey it? For a moment, she thought that she was not bound. Then an old memory rushed upon her, and it seemed to her that she heard the voice of her boy-companion telling her that it was mean to take advantage. She had obeyed this boyish voice implicitly. She had never done a mean action. She had never taken advantage of any one. And should she begin now? To her exalted probity and lightened imagination, it seemed that to break faith with a weakened judgment would be a meanness beyond parallel.

‘If only I had not promised!’ she said within herself.

Suddenly, a slight sound broke upon her ear. She looked up. Henry Bartropps stood before her.

‘Oh, is it you?’ she faltered.

She felt instinctively that she wore an agitated air. She strove to compose herself. Mechanically, she straightened her hat.

‘I hope I haven’t disturbed you,’ said he.

Then he stooped and picked up her book, which had fallen to the ground.

‘What are you reading?’ he said, looking at the title-page. ‘Oh, Herbert Spencer!’

His tone implied a certain surprise and a slight dissatisfaction. In truth, he was piqued. He had not read Spencer, and it annoyed him that Margaret

should be conversant with an author of whom he knew nothing.

‘Do you like Spencer?’ he said.

‘Yes,’ she replied.

‘I don’t study philosophy,’ observed he. ‘Life is hardly long enough for facts, and much too short for hypotheses.’

‘I like it,’ said Margaret.

She was ill at ease. For months she had carefully avoided a *tête-à-tête* with Henry, and after what had passed between herself and him on the previous day, she felt more than usually constrained with him. She was aware that she ought to talk,—to pass lightly from subject to subject. But she lacked facility of conversation, and it seemed to her, at that moment, as if neither heaven nor earth afforded an available topic. Henry, looking at her attentively and following her gaze, fancied that she turned her eyes in the direction of the island.

‘Shall we go over?’ he suggested. ‘Shall I row you across?’

‘Oh no,’ she said hurriedly. ‘I mean, thank you, but I would rather not. There is no one there.’

‘I know,’ said he. ‘But that doesn’t matter.’

She laughed nervously.

‘The children go over sometimes,’ she said. ‘They like playing there.’

‘I dare say. We liked it, when we were children. Didn’t we?’

‘I suppose we did.’

‘Do you know what somebody told me about you the other day?’ he asked.

‘No. Please don’t tell me, I am tired of hearing that people think me odd.’

‘They think you *romantic*,’ said he. ‘They say that, by educating girls and boys together, you hope to promote marriages among them when they grow up.’

‘Oh!’ she said.

‘Is it true?’

‘Yes.’

He bent forward eagerly.

‘Won’t you set them an example?’ he said.

She did not answer.

‘Will you be my wife?’ he went on. ‘Oh, Peggy, my

darling, I love you, I love you! I loved you the moment I saw you last year, and then I knew I had loved you always, even when I was a rude, rough boy. Oh, my darling, give me a right to make you happy!’

He put forth his hand. But she sprang to her feet and moved from him.

‘Don’t, don’t!’ she cried. ‘Please say no more. Never, never say such a thing again!’

‘But why?’ he said, coming close to her.

‘Why?’ she exclaimed, wildly. ‘Don’t you know? Has no one told you? Didn’t I once almost tell you? Didn’t you know my father had forbidden it?’

‘But your father was—was——’ stammered Henry.

‘I know what you mean. But I cannot help it.’

‘Oh, Peggy, have pity! Think of *me*. I love you so,—O God, I love you so!’

‘Don’t, don’t,’ she reiterated.

‘But do you not love me?’ he cried, passionately. ‘It is wrong and foolish to resist. You are spoiling both our lives. Oh, my dear, my sweet, come to me!’

He would have taken her in his arms. But she repelled him.

‘No, no,’ she said. ‘I promised my father to do what he wished.’

‘Such a promise cannot be binding,’ he said.

‘But it is, it is!’ she cried. ‘Oh, go, I pray you! You break my heart.’

‘Peggy, you love me! Oh, my little Peggy, my angel, my darling, for Heaven’s sake, come to me!’

Then she burst into sudden tears.

‘You will kill me,’ she sobbed.

She sat down again, exhausted. Then her eye fell upon her father’s letter and she pointed to it.

‘Read that,’ she said.

He picked it up and read it, frowning. Then he muttered. Finally he crushed the paper in his hand, and was about to cast it into the lake. But in an instant she had risen and laid her hand on his arm. Her whole manner had changed. Suddenly she was imperious and queenly.

‘Give me back my letter!’ she demanded.

He gave it unresistingly. He would have given the world to her at that moment, had he been its master.

'It's not a letter to be acted upon,' he said.

'It is a letter that must be acted upon,' she returned.

'But don't you see that it is unreasonable?' he urged.

'It is my father's will,' she rejoined.

'Oh, Peggy, are you going to destroy me?' he said mournfully. 'My darling, I love you beyond words. Is there nothing I can say or do to make you see that this is folly?'

She shook her head.

'Please, please go away,' she murmured.

'Peggy, you *do* love me!' he exclaimed.

He started forward. Again he would have folded her in his arms. But she motioned to him to withdraw, and he fell back a pace or two, looking at her with kindling eyes.

'If I were to say I loved you, what would be the good?' said she, weeping. 'Whether my father was wise or foolish, I cannot say. But he was my father, and this is his will respecting me, and I promised to try my utmost to fulfil it. I must not give you my love. I must not accept yours. How could I, with this letter in my hand? Oh! go away, I entreat you, and if it pleases you to know that you do not suffer alone——'

'Peggy, I cannot bear it,' interrupted he. 'You are so young—so inexperienced. You must not do this. You love me, Peggy, you love me, and I say you *shall* be mine! Nothing shall separate us.'

She was weeping sore. But she stretched forth her hands and repulsed him again.

'Don't tempt me! Oh, don't tempt me,' she sobbed. 'Oh, you don't know what you are doing! Go away, go away! I beseech you!'

'I will go away, because you tell me,' he said. 'But I shall come again.'

'No, no,' she entreated. 'Please never come back again! I would rather not see you again—till I am old and you are married.'

'I shall never marry any one but you,' he said.

'Good-bye, good-bye!' she cried.

So they parted, and no man knew what had passed at the mere-side that Sabbath morning.

The governesses did not see Margaret again that day. When the gong summoned them to dinner, they received

a message that Miss Jermine had a headache and would not come down. She hoped that they would excuse her and take care of themselves.

'She has been sitting out in the sun,' said Miss Smith, sagaciously.

'*Peut-être qu'elle descendra pour le thé,*' said Made-moiselle.

But Margaret did not appear at all. She remained alone in the old school-room and no one but her maid saw her. In the evening one of the governesses, passing up stairs, heard the sound of the piano.

'Miss Jermine is better,' she announced to her companions. 'I hear her playing.'

But Miss Smith, going up soon after, brought word that the music had ceased.

'I'm afraid her poor head is still bad,' said another lady, with sympathy.

Margaret, however, had stolen down stairs and gone out. It was nine o'clock and quite dark. The waning moon had not yet risen, and the starlight was faint. But the air was soft and the temperature was not cold. Clad in a dark dress, Margaret would have been invisible even if any one had been on the watch. But no one was looking forth from the windows and none molested her. Even Dash was seeking his supper in the back premises.

Almost mechanically, she went through the wood to the lake. All day she had lain quiescent, stunned and speechless, hardly able to think, only aware that a great pain possessed her. Late in the evening, some unbidden impulse roused her, and she went to the piano and played till the tears streamed down her cheeks and the keys were blurred in her sight. Then, with a great sob, she arose.

'I will go to my father's and mother's grave,' she said to herself, not knowing why she should seek peace among the dead.

And she slipped forth bareheaded.

'Oh, my love, my love!' she moaned as she hurried through the trees. 'Oh, Henry, my love, my darling, I love you, I love you!'

But no ear heard. Only the west wind sighed through the green wood, impotent and sorrowful.

When she reached the mere-side, she unlocked the boat-

house with trembling hands, unmoored the boat, and put the sculls into the rowlocks. Then she rowed herself across the lake. In the darkness it was a perilous transit. But she did not recognise this fact. Her mind, filled with one idea, was dead to any thought of danger. Even had she recognised it, she would have recked little of it. To sink into the mere and die was not, in that hour, the worst evil that she could contemplate.

She did not reach the island at the usual point. The little landing-stage was invisible in the deep gloom, and she missed it. But she got out of the boat, and, attaching the tiller ropes to the sculls and leaving the sculls high and dry, she went on her way to the grave of her parents. She could just discern the white cross at the grave's head, and she sat down, looking at it.

'Oh, father, why did you do it?' she thought.

Then, for a moment, her mind wandered, and she remembered sitting in that place many years ago when she was a little child, and thinking of her mother singing beautifully in Heaven. Time had unfolded many things to her, and she no longer believed that dead people wander through the skies with golden harps in their hands, making wondrous music. She conceived that any idea of an after-life was incomprehensible to intelligences living in the present, and she never thought of it. But the years had taught her to believe in God, and her idea of Him satisfied her, and had often afforded her consolation. Her God was not the God of the churches—not the God of Athanasius or of Luther. To her, He was the Entire Knowledge, who knows the Beginning and the End, but whom no finite comprehension can ever know. She had once written an essay on God, which Pinington had praised, and in it she had said, *Our world is part of a great system, and that system is perhaps part of a system greater still. God is a Great Knowledge pervading all systems. His thought has created them, and His mind has viewed the illimitable from end to end. Each moment follows the next. Each living creature is a sequence of the creature that went before. And God only knows how the sequence of events will fulfil His magnificent and inconceivable intention. Were our intelligence also entire, His intention would be plain to us, and we should be content. But we see only a part.* She thought of this belief now,

sighing profoundly. For she could not be content. Violent circumstances oppressed her, and their irrationality jarred upon and tortured her reasonableness. Two forces clashed within her. One bade her be strong and disregard the commands of a warped judgment. The other urged her to be honourable—to be true to her own integrity. Would the robustness of her reason—or the subtle potency of her sense of honour—prevail? She sat and thought, with bowed head, with hands pressed together.

There is a strange idea current that honourableness is essentially the virtue of men. It is a false idea. The delicate honourableness of women is more subtle than the aroma of the primrose, stronger and more unyielding than the pre-historic rock. Well is it that the early and impressionable years of men are most influenced by women. For it is from women that they drink in the pure and lofty code of honour which rules their manhood, rendering them true-hearted and stalwart, and sometimes heroic and glorious. Had the nun Catherine reformed the Church, the monk Luther had never broken his vow of celibacy. Doubtless the marriage of these twain who were sworn to chastity was expedient, and the common sense of the world has been fortified by the coarseness and audacity of the monk's manhood. But there are virtues that transcend common sense, and the bridal of the monk and nun has assuredly retarded the evolution of the highest morality.

Margaret's honourableness triumphed. She had once uttered a vague and but half-understood promise, and she knew now that the demand made upon her had been irrational. But she abode by it. Almost automatically, she resolved that she would never yield to her lover's entreaties.

'I have promised, I have promised!' she cried aloud, in her mighty grief. 'Oh, Henry, my love, my dearest, I have promised! Let me never see you more!'

And again no ear heard, but only the west wind sighed in its impotent sympathy.

For hours Margaret sat crouched upon the grave's foot. Sometimes she wailed in speechless anguish. Sometimes she called upon the name of Henry, crying that she loved him. Sometimes she cried wildly to her father, demanding why he had brought this woe upon her. During long

intervals she remained perfectly quiescent, and her soul within her seemed to be paralysed, and she could neither think nor speak.

The distorted moon climbed up the sky and threw its melancholy radiance upon the strange scene. But Margaret hardly noticed that the darkness had dissipated. In the early morning, clouds gathered, and the pallid moon seemed to rush through them, distraught. Then a thick veil overspread her countenance, and immediately heavy rain began to descend, pelting mercilessly upon Margaret's unsheltered and half-clad form. This roused her. She rose up with a shudder and walked back to the place where she had left her boat. But it was gone. Her nervous fingers had fastened it insecurely and it had floated away. She did not care. She was wet and cold. But in her present mental state, she felt no bodily discomfort. Mechanically, she betook herself to Pinington's deserted house, and, finding the door fastened, she sat down upon the bench in the porch. After a time, she fell asleep. Several times she awoke shivering.

'Oh, my love, I promised,' she murmured each time.

She slept thus fitfully for hours, till the sun was high in the heavens and all the world was astir. At last, she started violently and opened wide her eyes. Dr. Wheble and Miss Ovid were standing beside her. But she did not know them.

'Oh, my love, I promised,' she muttered, in a hoarse voice, looking at them with eyes that saw only Henry.

CHAPTER XX.

MANY days elapsed before Margaret was well enough to recall the events of the day and night immediately preceding her illness. Recollection came to her gradually. When the fevered excitement under which she was labouring subsided, she was at first only aware that she was in bed, that she felt weak and disinclined to move, that Miss Ovid was constantly with her, and that Dr. Wheble came in and out. At last, she recalled her solitary vigil upon the island and the circumstances that had led to it.

‘How did you know I was on the island, Carissima?’ she asked one day.

Miss Ovid was surprised. For hitherto Margaret had said nothing.

‘You were missing, my darling, and we sought for you,’ she replied, guardedly. ‘When we found the boat floating on the mere, we went over as soon as possible.’

‘You didn’t think I was drowned, did you?’

‘We were very anxious, dear.’

‘Oh, Carissima, I’m so sorry. I can’t bear to think I made you anxious.’

‘Never mind, my darling. It doesn’t matter now that you are getting well.’

‘It was wrong of me to do it,’ said Margaret, sighing. ‘But I meant to come back. I did fasten the boat. Still I know it was wrong.’

‘You were not wise, certainly, my dear,’ said Miss Ovid. ‘But don’t worry yourself about it now.’

Later in the day, Margaret noticed a vase of hothouse flowers on a table.

‘Where did those orchids come from?’ she asked. ‘I didn’t know we had any like them.’

'They don't come from your own houses,' said Miss Ovid. 'Henry Bartropps brought them.'

'Oh!' said Margaret, turning away her head. 'He is very kind.'

'He has been most attentive,' continued Miss Ovid. 'Several times he came to inquire after you twice a day.'

Margaret did not reply, and as her face was averted, Miss Ovid thought that she was tired and did not pursue the conversation. But the next day fresh flowers arrived from Bartropps, and Margaret exerted herself to speak.

'Carissima, Henry Bartropps mustn't bring me flowers every day,' she said. 'I don't like it. Please let them go down into the drawing-room.'

'As you like, my darling,' said Miss Ovid. 'But there is no one to see them down stairs.'

'Where are the children, Carissima? And Miss Smith, and Mademoiselle, and all the others?'

'They are at Bartropps, dear child. Henry and Mrs. Minimy sent for them directly they heard you were ill.'

Margaret's eyes filled with tears.

'How kind—how very kind!' she murmured.

And she did not insist on having Henry's flowers removed. Nay, she lay looking at them with passive eyes.

'Carissima!' she said suddenly.

'Yes, my dear,' replied the lady.

'Carissima, have I been very ill?'

'Yes, dear.'

'Was I not sensible? Did I talk foolishly?'

'Sometimes,' owned Miss Ovid, reluctantly.

'Carissima, please tell me what I said?'

Miss Ovid hesitated.

'Please tell me?' repeated Margaret. 'I would rather know. It distresses me more to imagine things.'

'You said very little that was coherent, dear child,' said Miss Ovid, gently. 'You kept calling to Henry, and then crying out, "I promised, I promised!"'

A crimson blush rushed into Margaret's cheeks.

'Did any one hear me but you?' she asked

'No. No one else has been near you. I would not let any one else wait on you on purpose.'

'Oh, Carissima, how tired you must be!'

'Nay, not now. The fever only lasted a few days, and

since then, as you know, Thompson has helped to wait on you.'

'How very, very kind you were, Carissima!'

'Oh no, my darling,' said the lady, pressing her hand.

'Yes. You were,' insisted Margaret. 'You were more kind than I can say. It would kill me if every one knew. Did you guess?'

'I had a vague suspicion,' said Miss Ovid, who had wondered much whether Henry's absence from church on that Sunday morning could have been connected with Margaret's subsequent withdrawal to the island.

'It was Sunday,' said Margaret, slowly. 'It was the first fine day and I went out with a book. The children were away and every one had gone to church. Then Henry Bartropps came to me in the woods and I could not avoid him. Perhaps you may guess what he said—I cannot tell you. But what passed made me very, very unhappy, and in the evening I went out alone. I wanted to go and think beside my mother's grave. I used to do that sometimes, when I was a little girl. Do you remember years ago, when I was about seven, my falling into the mere and being ill afterwards? It is curious that I was with Henry Bartropps then. Poor Henry!' she added, almost unconsciously.

'My darling!' said Miss Ovid, stroking her hand, not knowing what better to say or do.

'I can never do what he wishes,' Margaret went on. 'That is why I didn't want the flowers. Will you tell him so?'

'My dear, I cannot come in between two people,' said Miss Ovid. 'Wait till you are well.'

'But you must, you must!' cried Margaret, eagerly, raising herself on her elbow. 'The next time he comes, please say to him, "Margaret thanks you much for all your kindness, but she begs me to ask you to bring no more flowers, and to say it is of no use." I think he will understand,' added she, lying back again.

'I will do it if you really wish it,' said Miss Ovid.

'I do really wish it,' said Margaret. 'And please let the children come back. I am not ill now, and they won't disturb me in the least.'

So when Henry called in the afternoon, Miss Ovid went down to see him and gave him Margaret's message,

reluctantly, and with a heavy heart. Henry's countenance fell.

'What do you know, Miss Ovid?' he asked after a moment.

I know nothing, but that you and Margaret met on that Sunday morning three weeks ago,' she replied. 'I had inferred that something had occurred, and to-day she told me that you had met and talked.'

Since you know so much, I will tell you all,' said he. 'I asked her to be my wife. I asked her more than once, Miss Ovid. She gave me her father's letter to read and then she sent me away.'

'I gathered something of the kind,' said Miss Ovid.

'I went away miserable,' resumed Henry. 'I only went away because she implored me to go. But I never meant to go for good. I love her with all my soul.'

Miss Ovid extended her hand in silent sympathy. He took it, and returned its kind pressure.

'Mr. Jermine must have been insane,' he said. 'Was he not?'

'I cannot say—I didn't know him,' returned she. 'My uncle says it was hypertrophy.'

'But you have seen his letter?'

'Yes.'

'And isn't it the letter of a lunatic?'

'It is certainly a very strange letter,' she said.

'Strange!' he ejaculated, bitterly. 'It is either a *mad* letter or a *wicked* letter.'

There was a pause.

'Will she be guided by it always?' he asked.

'I cannot say.'

'But will you try and induce her to think differently about it?'

'I have tried,' said Miss Ovid. 'I have been urging her to think differently ever since I came to live with her.'

'But will you not try again?'

Miss Ovid remained silent.

'She is not indifferent to me,' continued Henry. 'I don't speak out of vanity. I am not a conceited idiot who thinks every woman is pining for him. I don't even think I am what fools call a *parti*. I am no *parti* for Miss Jermine of Ule. She is in every respect my equal. But she loves me

—she *loves* me, Miss Ovid! Do you hear? Do you understand? She *loves* me!’

Then he suddenly recollected himself and his pride returned to him.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said, coldly. ‘I didn’t mean to make a fool of myself. But what I said in my heat, I repeat calmly. I am entirely convinced that Margaret is not indifferent to me, and I believe she would accept me, but for this letter of her father’s. Will you not—for her sake as well as mine—try and convince her that to regard such a letter is folly?’

Still Miss Ovid did not speak.

‘She must have been unhappy, or she would never have gone to the island as she did,’ he argued. ‘If she had been indifferent to me, she would have dismissed me and felt no pain. But she was very much moved. She cried, Miss Ovid,—she cried so that I could scarcely bear it! She told me to go away, or I should kill her. She told me not to tempt her. She *must* care for me—she *does* care for me! Miss Ovid, I *will* have her! Will you tell her so? You have given me her message. Will you give mine to her? Will you tell her that I will *not* accept her nay as final?—that I will not *permit* that letter to stand between us?—that I will ask her again?—that—that—’

In his vehement eagerness, words failed him. He had been standing on the hearthrug. But he could not endure Miss Ovid’s gaze. He moved quickly away to one of the windows and looked out. Miss Ovid sat petrified. She was not apathetic. Nay, she had large sympathies and was kind and tender-hearted. But her temperament was essentially calm and self-repressive, and she had never loved. She had indeed lavished much affection upon her younger sister, upon her uncle, upon Margaret. But of the love of which poets sing and of which young men and maidens dream, she knew nothing. She had no answer to give to Henry’s outburst. She gazed at him, speechless, almost frightened. After a few moments, he returned to her.

‘Miss Ovid, I beg your pardon,’ he said. ‘I think I quite forgot myself. I ought not to have spoken so violently. But I want you to understand, all the same, that I quite meant what I said, though I ought to have said it more temperately. Will you tell Miss Jermine, please, that I will

bring her no more flowers, since she does not wish it, but that I am not repulsed, and that I shall come again and shall strive to win her yet?’

Then he prepared to take his leave.

‘Good-bye,’ he said, holding Miss Ovid’s hand for a moment. ‘I believe I have been very rude. You look as if I had alarmed you.’

‘No,’ she said. ‘But don’t hope, Henry. I beg you not to hope.’

‘Does that mean that you won’t help me?—that you are not my friend?’ he asked.

‘Nay,’ she replied. ‘But it means that I have argued this matter so often and always in vain, that I don’t expect to do better now.’

‘But you will try?’ said he.

‘Yes. I will try,’ she assented, gravely. ‘But let me beg of you not to expect that I shall succeed.’

‘I don’t despair,’ he said, thinking of the scene in the wood of which Miss Ovid had not been a spectator. ‘I know she is not unmindful of me. It is only a scruple which stands between us.’

Then he went away, and after a little time Miss Ovid returned to Margaret. She did not intend to deliver Henry’s message that day, or for many days to come. But when Margaret questioned her, she found it difficult to evade a direct answer.

‘What did he say?’ inquired Margaret.

‘He asked after you, dear,’ replied Miss Ovid.

‘Yes. Of course. I didn’t mean that. What did he say when you gave him my message? You did give it to him, did you not?’

‘He said he would bring you no more flowers, as you did not wish it.’

‘Was that all?’

‘N—no.’

‘What else did he say?’

‘I will tell you another day, my darling.’

‘But I would rather know now, please.’

‘No, no.’

‘Then he said something I shall not like to hear?’

‘I hardly know, Margaret. Wait till you are better,’ dear child.’

'But I am nearly well, Carissima. This is the second day I have been in the schoolroom, and on Monday I am to go down stairs.'

'Well, when you are down stairs then.'

'Did you say the children were to come back?'

'No.'

'Then will you write two notes?—one to Mr. Bartropps, thanking him for his hospitality, and one to Mrs. Minimy, asking her to send the whole party back the first thing to-morrow.'

But Miss Ovid would not do this.

'Not without my uncle's permission,' she said.

'How you do cross me!' said Margaret, plaintively. 'I never knew you unkind to me before, Carissima.'

Whereat Miss Ovid smiled, and bade her remember that she was an invalid and that the invalid's virtue was child-likeness. Margaret strove to be cheerful. But she did not forget that Henry had said more to Miss Ovid than had been communicated to her, and on the following Monday, when she had been brought down stairs, she recurred to the subject.

'Now, please, Carissima, tell me exactly what Henry Bartropps said,' she demanded. 'You see, I am quite well now—only not quite strong.'

'My uncle will be here directly,' said Miss Ovid, evasively.

'Oh, not yet. I begged him particularly to come here at lunch-time to-day. He never gets up so early as this. What did Henry Bartropps say? You saw him in this room, didn't you? Did he sit on this sofa?'

'No. He stood most of the time. He sat for a few minutes on the red chair. Then he got up and stood.'

'And he said——'

'He said he would bring you no more flowers.'

'Oh, Carissima, don't tease me! What else did he say?'

'My dear, he sent you a message. But I hardly like to give it you. I'm afraid it will vex you.'

'Never mind. What was it?'

'He begged me to say he was not repulsed and that he should come again and do his best to win you yet.'

Margaret reddened.

'He must not do that,' she said, after a moment. 'Carissima, on no account whatever must you ever leave me alone with him for a moment. You *never* must—*never*. I cannot ever let him speak to me again. I could not bear it.'

'My dear, are you wise? are you right?' cried Miss Ovid.

'Yes. I am right,' returned Margaret emphatically. 'I can never change. Don't let me have to pain him again. Don't let me have to pain myself again. If I were God, and knew everything, I should see the meaning of it,' she added, with a wan smile.

'My dearest, do you lo——' began Miss Ovid.

But Margaret raised her hand.

'Hush!' she said, imperiously. 'I have nothing to do with love. All I tell you—all I told Henry Bartropps—is, that I can never marry. Don't try and persuade me, Carissima! I shall never give way. Never speak to me about it again, and never, never leave me alone again with Henry Bartropps.'

So, when Henry called at Ule, he found a third person constantly present, and but for his great love and longing, his great pride would have driven him away. But Love is ever lord of all, and it subjugated even the indomitable lordliness of the young man who had never hitherto suffered thwarting or denial.

One Sunday he joined Miss Ovid after church and walked with her towards Ule. She sighed as he approached her. But she bade the children who accompanied her run on with Miss Smith, and she and her companion walked slowly after the little party.

'Have you spoken to her?' Henry began at once.

She replied briefly in the affirmative.

'What did she say?' he asked.

'My dear Henry, I told you to anticipate nothing. She desired me never to leave her alone with you.'

'I guessed as much,' said he, with some bitterness. 'But I *must* see her alone.'

'She will never consent,' said Miss Ovid.

'Doesn't that show that she isn't indifferent to me?' he exclaimed. 'Oh, Miss Ovid, why won't you help me? Why won't you help us both?'

'I can't—against her will,' said Miss Ovid knitting her brow.

'But have you expostulated with her? Have you argued with her?'

'Yes. That is, I began. But she refused to listen to a single word. She told me never to refer to the subject.'

Henry groaned.

'Will you let me see her once alone?' he asked.

Miss Ovid shook her head.

'I cannot,' she said.

'Then what am I to do?' he cried.

'I cannot help you,' said Miss Ovid. 'I would if I could. Margaret's fate grieves me. But I cannot help it.'

'She tries to appear cold,' said Henry. 'Sometimes she is almost rude to me. But I see through it. It is only a ruse. I *must* speak to her. Miss Ovid, help me!'

Then Miss Ovid relented a very little.

'I will tell you what I can do,' she said. 'Come this afternoon when Margaret is singing and playing to the little ones. I will call them away for a moment—only for a moment, mind, and only to the other end of the room. But the room is large. Say what you have to say quickly.'

'Thank you,' said Henry, fervently.

'Nay. Don't thank me,' said she. 'I am a traitor.'

Margaret had, indeed, treated Henry with a marked coldness since her recovery from her illness. She had gone so far as to show him discourtesy. She had found fault with him. She had ridiculed his opinions. She had conversed upon topics of which he knew nothing, and had sneered at his ignorance. Frequently she had refused to speak to him at all. Several times she had called the children around her and played some game with them. Sometimes she had excused herself on the plea that she must read aloud in an adjoining chamber. Oftener still, she had quitted the room without apology and had not returned to it. When she had chosen to talk, her conversation had been constructed as if to show off her attainments. Hitherto, she had been singularly modest, and her talents had been kept in the background. But since her illness, she had vaunted her scholarship, she had intruded her learning, she had assumed a vast intellectual superiority. She had chosen to garnish her speech with classical quotations, with recondite hints,

with abstruse allusions. She had been pedantic, didactic, almost priggish.

Miss Ovid, who knew her so well, watched this strange phase, and her heart sank because of it. Surely, she thought, Margaret must love this man, or she would never be at the trouble to make herself so offensive in his eyes. Once, entering Margaret's presence abruptly, Miss Ovid had found her weeping. Henry had but shortly departed. During his visit, it had pleased Margaret to talk of philosophy. She had discussed hypotheses as men discuss Acts of Parliament. She had named theories as one names the Plays of Sheridan. She had quoted Lucretius. She had mentioned Bacon familiarly. She had referred to the Platonists and the Cartesians as she might have referred to the Joneses and the Robinsons. Her semblance of conceit had annoyed Henry. But he loved her, and love endures much. He was too astute to make random or foolish remarks, so he had held his peace. But to be silent while a young woman harangued him arrogantly, had galled him.

'I don't know much of philosophy,' he had said, at last. 'My bent has led me to other fields.'

'Oh, indeed!' Margaret had returned, in a tone of contempt. 'Even my babies are learning the rudiments of philosophy.'

Then there had been a short pause, and Margaret had sat abstractedly, with her hands folded and her eyes bent upon the carpet.

'I should rather like to read a little philosophy, if you would recommend me something not too stiff,' Henry had said, after a few moments, making a gigantic concession.

Margaret had started slightly.

'Did you speak?' she had said, languidly. 'I was continuing my train of thought, and I forgot I was not alone. You must forgive my incivility. I dare say you also lose yourself when you are engaged in thinking of other fields.'

Her tone and manner had been almost insolent, and Henry had taken his leave without delay. But he had not been offended.

'It is overdone,' he had said to himself, as he rode home. 'It is mere acting, and it means the reverse of what it seems.'

Margaret, however, had retired to the old schoolroom and

had wept, and when Miss Ovid had come to her, she had not attempted to conceal her tears.

'Oh, Carissima, I am so miserable,' she had cried. 'It is an awful thing to be always saying one thing and meaning another. If he does not go away, I must. Even if I have to give up the children, I must get away from him.'

It was the next day that Henry had implored Miss Ovid to help him, and it was the remembrance of Margaret's tears that had caused that lady to yield.

'Something must be done,' she thought, as she nervously awaited Henry's coming, striving to absolve her conscience from the charge of treachery. 'The dear child looks almost as ill as when she was ill, and this is killing her. To-day must settle it. Either she will give way, or poor Henry will give it up.'

Margaret was at the piano and surrounded by half a dozen boys and girls, when Henry came in. She did not stop playing. She merely bowed to the new comer. She was playing a march.

'This is how ambition rushes onwards,' Henry heard her say.

'What is ambition, Aunt Margaret?' a little voice asked.

'Ambition!' said Henry, coming to the piano. 'Ambition is the determination to win a coveted object.'

'Are you ambitious, Aunt Margaret?' asked one of the boys.

'No,' she replied. 'If I were, I should compose a great symphony or write a great book.'

'One may be ambitious of tenderer things than fame and honour,' said Henry. 'One may be ambitious of happiness.'

'Indeed!' said Margaret, with disdain. 'I care for neither the one nor the other. I have ease. I can command books, music, scenery, at my will. What more do I want? If one has the elements of happiness, one has happiness.'

'Only the question is—What is happiness?' said Henry.

'This,' returned Margaret.

And she resumed playing. She played one of Bach's preludes, and it was a masterly performance. But it conveyed no tender thought to the listener.

'I like Mendelssohn, or Chopin,' said Henry.

'Do you?' rejoined Margaret. 'So do I, in a measure.'

But there is an intellectual joy in such compositions as this which quite supersedes the sentimental rapture caused by more sensuous music.'

'Intellect is not everything,' said he.

'It is everything to me,' returned she.

Miss Ovid had moved to the further end of the room and was looking out of the window. It was late in May. The sun was bright. A pink hawthorn bloomed within sight, and a laburnum hung its golden fringe beside it. The borders were still gay with tulips.

'Oh, children, do come and look at these two funny water-wagtails!' exclaimed Miss Ovid, suddenly.

The children scampered to her side at once. In a moment, Margaret and Henry were left alone. The colour flushed into Margaret's cheeks and she rose hastily.

'Let us go and see the water-wagtails too!' she said.

'Oh, wait a moment, wait one moment!' pleaded Henry. 'Peggy, my darling, you have been very unkind to me. But you cannot drive me away, and I love you just the same. Come to me, my dearest, and let us forget the past!'

For an instant Margaret did not answer, and her lips trembled with a great emotion. Then she looked scornfully at the man before her.

'Poor foolish wretch!' she said, slowly and distinctly. 'Please to let me pass.'

He stood away from her, stung to the core. After a moment, he quitted the room without attempting to bid adieu to the ladies and children who were clustered round the window. On his way home, he encountered Wheble.

'Are you coming from Ule?' said the latter. 'I am just going thither.'

'Oh!' said Henry, absently.

And he went on his way.

Wheble looked after him, sighing. He knew of Henry's love and of Margaret's obduracy, and he had spoken upon the subject to his niece, although he had not broached it to Margaret. Now, however, he began to think that a remonstrance on his part might be timely, and he resolved that he would seek an occasion of speaking gravely to Margaret.

When he reached Ule, the whole party were at tea. Margaret welcomed her old friend with cordiality. But

she did not smile, and there was no animation in her manner.

‘Have you good news of Isabee?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘She is making gorgeous purchases under the auspices of Mrs. St. Roque. She is coming home next week.’

‘Dr. Wheble, have you made up your mind to come and live with us?’

‘No, my dear Margaret, I have not. I am getting too old to move.’

‘But you will be so lonely!’

‘I dare say. But I shall see you and Aurelia often.’

‘Will you come and stay with us sometimes, Dr. Wheble? You shall have a suite of rooms where the uproar of the little ones will not disturb you.’

‘Thank you, my dear. Perhaps I will do that—if there should come nothing to make it impracticable,’ he said.

Then they all went out into the garden, and after a time Margaret found herself alone with Wheble in one of the wild and secluded shrubberies which terminated in the wood. A few primroses still lingered. Beyond them, in the shade, clustered the sturdy wild hyacinths and they scented the air. The bracken was yet of a tender green, and it too emitted a faint odour. The tree-branches met above and swayed a little in the evening breeze. Below there was no air. Nothing stirred the primrose petals amid their yellowing leaves, nor the hyacinth-bells on their thick, short stalks. Only the sunshine broke through the vernal greenery and kissed the flowers and lit up the mossy path and the two walking there.

‘You don’t look very well, my dear,’ said Wheble, abruptly.

‘Indeed, I am quite well, thank you,’ returned Margaret.

‘You don’t look as well as you did a month ago,’ insisted the doctor.

‘Oh, I’m all right,’ declared Margaret. ‘Don’t vex yourself about me, dear Dr. Wheble.’

‘But I *do* vex myself,’ said he. ‘The world belongs—as it were—to young people. They are the kings and queens of earth, and if they are not well and happy, who can be? It grieves me intensely, Margaret, to see young people missing the beauty of life. I met Henry Bartropps just

now, and he looked as wretched as if he were a poor navvy out of work, instead of being a wealthy young man with all the world at his feet. I couldn't bear to see him.'

'Isn't he well?' asked Margaret.

'I think he is in love, my dear,' rejoined Wheble.

There was a slight pause. Margaret made no remark. But Wheble could see that she reddened and that her breath came quickly.

'I believe Henry Bartropps is in love,' he repeated. 'I am very sorry for him. To be in love is to have a malady of whose strength and painfulness no one knows who has not suffered it. Of course, the strength and the painfulness of it vary. Some people are shallow and love very little, and are easily made whole again. But others love passionately and deeply, and do not recover soon or easily. If Henry is of these latter, his whole life will suffer.'

Still Margaret refrained from speaking. But her cheeks burned and her bosom heaved.

'I know what love is,' continued Wheble. 'I don't know if you are aware, Margaret, that I loved your mother and that I live lonely for her sake. I loved her so well that no other woman has ever appealed to me. It has been impossible that any other woman should be my wife. I loved her from the first moment I saw her, and I strove to win her. But Charles Jermine was the favoured one and he married her. I told no one. I have never told any one till to-day. But I own to you that when I heard she and he were engaged, I went home and cried like a child. There are no words to express my disappointment. It nearly killed, me, child. I was a young man then, and my heart was hot within me, and I longed for her—I longed for her so unutterably that it seemed as if my physical frame must burst with longing.'

'Oh, Dr. Wheble, don't,' murmured Margaret.

'Yes. It nearly killed me,' he went on, relentlessly. 'Nothing but the knowledge that she was happy, saved me. But it scarred me for ever. My dear child, you don't know what such a disappointment is to a man. It is agony.'

'Oh, Dr. Wheble, please don't,' cried Margaret.

'My dearest girl, don't you know that Henry Bartropps loves you?' said Wheble. 'Why do you cause him this anguish?'

'Do *you* ask?' cried Margaret. 'Why do you tempt me? I have given him his answer, and he must be content.'

'He cannot be content.'

'I cannot help it. Oh, Dr. Wheble, why do you go against me?—you, who know everything?'

'Go against you! Heaven forbid! My dear, I never went against you or even thought a thought against you. But I long for your happiness, Margaret. You love Henry——'

'Hush, hush, Dr. Wheble! Dear Dr. Wheble, don't say such things! I cannot listen. I must not listen. I promised my father——'

'But listen to me!' interrupted Wheble. 'Your father was a clever man. But he was an egoist, and, like many egoists, he suffered himself to become the victim of a wilful hypertrophy. When your mother died, he did not think of the loss to you, or of the loss to the world. He thought exclusively of the loss to himself. He brooded upon this one idea, fed it, stimulated it, until it became his sole idea, and his mental equilibrium was overthrown. His sense of the ratio of things was lost, and he became irrational. Surely, for the sake of an unreasonable being, whose reason was thus wilfully perverted, you will not sacrifice the happiness of a lifetime?'

'But I promised,' reiterated she.

'That is mere scrupulousness.'

'Nay, Dr. Wheble. It would not invalidate the contract to buy or sell a house that one party was unreasonable and drove a hard bargain.'

'You will, then, kill Henry, or at least you will destroy his happiness, to please a father who does not know what you are doing, or, if he does know, would be glad you should disobey him?' said Wheble, caustically.

'I don't know,' said Margaret.

And she began to weep.

'But you do know, my dear,' said Wheble, gently. 'Forgive me, if I spoke harshly. But I think you are wrong, and it maddens me.'

'Did Henry ask you to speak to me?' said Margaret.

'No. He has never named the subject. But I saw it in his face. I saw his love and his grief, and I see the same in your face, my poor child.'

She wept without speaking.

'It *is* a scruple,' he declared. 'Such a promise to such a person is *not* binding.'

'But I cannot take advantage,' sobbed Margaret. 'Let me do right! Oh, dear Dr. Wheble, help me to do right!'

So Wheble went home, vexed and thwarted. And Margaret tossed miserably upon her bed and cried herself to sleep after the sun had risen.

And the next day she received a letter from Henry. He had sat up most of the night to write it, and when at last he had sealed it, he was satisfied that it was simple and manly and withal passionate.

'She must read it,' he thought.

But she did not read it. She put it straightway, unopened, into an envelope, re-directed it, and desired that a servant should ride with it to Bartropps without delay. This was the crowning stab. When Henry, tearing the envelope apart, eagerly and with a panting breast, found that his letter had been untouched, he flung himself face forwards on the table and groaned aloud.

'Good God!' he cried in his bitterness, 'Good God, it is all over!'

CHAPTER XXI.

HENRY quitted Bartropps within a few hours of Margaret's final rejection of his suit. At first he was plunged into the deepest depression. His grief was poignant, and, in his severe disappointment, it seemed that life no longer contained anything that was glorious, beautiful, or worth having. He went to London and tried to distract himself. But it was to very little purpose that he joined in the diversions of the season. Theatres bored him. Races failed to interest him. Society was odious to him, because society was permeated by women, and at present he felt that intercourse with women would be distasteful to him for ever. At this juncture, it was suggested to him to offer himself as a candidate for the representation of South Gladeshire at a probably ensuing bye-election. Thereupon, he threw himself with ardour into politics. He frequented political meetings. He attended debates in the House of Commons. He cultivated the acquaintance of the influential men of his party. But during this period, he abstained from visiting the St. Roques, although St. Roque was a man of some eminence, and at his house the chiefs of the party were often to be met.

After a few weeks, however, his despondency gave way to pique, and his first feeling of sorrowful disappointment merged itself into one of angry mortification and affronted *amour-propre*. He began to view past events with different eyes. One day it suddenly occurred to him that perhaps Margaret had been playing with him—that possibly she had drawn him on simply to show her power over him. This thought filled him with indignation. He did not despise women. But, hidden within the recesses of his soul, lurked

the feeling that certainly Bartropps of Bartropps should be able to throw the handkerchief. That instead of throwing the handkerchief, Bartropps of Bartropps should have been made a fool of and trifled with, chagrined him much. The remembrance of the letter that had been returned to him unopened rankled in his mind. He considered that he had suffered an indignity and it chafed him. His love for Margaret began slowly to decrease and to be replaced by a feeling of bitter resentment. He was a proud man. His pride had been deeply wounded and he suffered keenly. Moreover, he had been thwarted for the first time in his life, and he could not brook the pain of contradiction. Margaret's simple agony of grief had touched him greatly at first. Now the thought of it made him impatient. He no longer believed in her scrupulousness. He encouraged himself to think that she had been coquetting with him to gratify her vanity, and he waxed more and more irate every day. Nevertheless, he was very unhappy. When a man has truly loved, even if he persuades himself that his idol was made of clay, he cannot soon forget. The empty shrine is not quickly filled, and while it is void, there is dissatisfaction.

One morning, Henry received a little letter from Mrs. St. Roque :

‘DEAR HENRY,’ she wrote. ‘Why have you never been to see us? Mamma tells me you have been in town for a month! What have you been doing? Please come to dinner on Sunday and give an account of yourself.

‘Your very affectionate

‘BLANCHE ST. ROQUE.’

He could not refuse this invitation, and on the following Sunday he repaired to St. Roque's house. He found Mrs. St. Roque alone.

‘I came early to make my peace with you, my Minimy-my,’ he said, sitting down beside her. ‘I'm afraid you are dreadfully displeased with me. But——’

‘Oh, no, my dear boy!’ cried Mrs. St. Roque. ‘Not displeased! I felt a little hurt—that was all. Why haven't you been to see us?’

‘Well, I've been very busy,’ replied he. ‘I'm going in for politics, you know. I expect I shall be called upon to

stand for South Gladeshire, if Lord Bolton dies and George Bolton goes to the Upper House. Indeed, I've agreed to stand. I dare say I sha'n't get in. The seat will be contested, of course. Still, I thought it would be as well to saturate myself with politics, in case of a happy accident.'

'And yet you didn't come here!' exclaimed Mrs. St. Roque. 'Surely big Adrian could help you better than most men! Fie! Henry, you are not speaking the truth!'

'To be honest with you, my Minimy-my, I thought it expedient to eschew the society of ladies for a time,' said Henry. 'The claims of ladies——'

'Eschew ladies' society!' cried Mrs. St. Roque. 'Oh, my dear Henry, how could you? What were you thinking of, my dear boy? That's not at all a wise plan, I assure you. Why, don't you know Lord Beaconsfield thinks ladies are an unexampled influence? He has said so, over and over again, both in books and conversation. Oh, my dearest Henry, you must never eschew ladies! I assure you, it's most undesirable. Big Adrian says a politician is nowhere without a pretty and accomplished wife. You must promise you won't be so naughty again!'

St. Roque also took Henry gently to task and bantered him upon the strangeness of his conduct. Cecily, however, said nothing. She swept into the room after dinner had been announced, richly dressed in cream-coloured satin, with stephanotis in her hair and pearls around her neck. She gave Henry the tips of her fingers. * She was cold and indifferent. During the greater part of dinner she conversed eagerly with her father, leaning across the corner of the table and speaking low. But Henry was the only guest, and he could not but overhear much of what passed.

'Lord Bolton is still very ill,' he heard her say. 'I suppose one of Lord Restive's sons will try for South Gladeshire, if Mr. Bolton goes up. What chance would Edward Restive have, papa?'

'Is Edward Restive going to try for South Gladeshire?' inquired Henry, surprised. 'Why, they've asked me to stand!'

'Oh!' said Cecily, frigidly.

And she leant back in her chair, silent and disdainful, while her father and Henry discussed the situation.

When the gentlemen joined the ladies after dinner, Henry

did not immediately perceive Cecily, and he inquired where she was.

'Not gone to church in such gorgeous array, I presume?' he said smiling.

'She is in the conservatory,' replied the stepmother. 'Go and make your peace with her.'

'Is she very angry with me?' asked Henry, lingering.

'Go and see,' said Mrs. St. Roque.

So Henry went. He found Cecily lounging in a low easy-chair among the flowers, with her beautiful dress spread around her and her small and daintily-shod feet crossed upon a carved footstool. She did not move her dress, or even raise her eyes from her book when he approached her. He stood looking at her for a moment, amused.

'Mayn't I sit down, Cecily?' he said, at last.

'To be sure,' she replied. 'Is there not a seat?'

'Yes. Underneath your furbelows. May I move your dress?'

He lifted the folds of satin as he spoke and seated himself beside her.

'What a swell you are!' he remarked.

'Am I?' she said, languidly.

'Yes, my dear. But what's the matter with you? You don't seem well.'

'I am quite well, thank you.'

'Then what are you in the dumps for?'

'What do you mean?' she said.

He laughed.

'Come, Cecily, don't pretend you don't know broad English! You are cross, my dear. What's it all about?'

'I am not cross,' said she, stiffly.

'Something very like it. You are annoyed with me. What have I done?'

She did not tell him. She had foreseen that he would attack her for her stateliness at dinner. But she had planned that he should attack her ruefully, and she had not prepared herself to parry these fraternal thrusts.

'You are wonderfully free this evening!' she said, coldly.

'I wonder you don't say,—“What's up, old girl!”'

He laughed again.

'No, my dear. Not even such pretty lips as yours can dare me to forget myself quite,' he said. 'I was about——'

But she interrupted him, her eyes flashing.

'I will not receive compliments from you!' she exclaimed. 'You don't mean them — you know you don't mean them — and I will not hear them said!'

'Who ever means a compliment, my tragedy-queen?' said Henry, carelessly.

Cecily bit her lip. For a few moments neither spoke. Then Henry broke the silence.

'Come, Cecily, forgive me,' he said. 'Don't let two such old friends quarrel about nothing. You are angry with me, because I haven't been to call. Well, I own I was wrong. But I've been very busy. You don't want me to neglect business, do you? when a political career hangs on it, too! You shouldn't be so put out, my dear. I came here expecting sympathy and you give me nothing but black looks. It doesn't encourage me to come again, I must say.'

'Have you *really* been awfully busy?' asked Cecily, in a softened tone.

'Really! Up to my chin.'

'But you might have come on Sundays.'

'Last Sunday I was out of town.'

'And the Sunday before that?'

'I was at the Percys.'

'And the Sunday before that, sir!'

'Ah, there you have me. I was moping at my rooms.'

'I thought so! It was very wrong of you, sir. I sat at home, pining to go to the Oratory. Papa and mamma won't go. They have a virtuous English horror of anything Romish. But you might have taken me.'

'Why didn't you let me know? How could I divine you wanted me?'

Cecily sighed. How, indeed, could he divine, since Love is the only seer?

'It doesn't matter,' she said. 'Of course I couldn't have gone with you, if you had come.'

'But you forgive me?' he said.

She nodded.

'That's right,' said he, cheerfully. 'Now, where shall we begin? I have secluded myself from social spheres for a month. Who is born, dead, or married?'

'Nobody,' said Cecily. 'Isabee's wedding is fixed for the

twenty-eighth, and we are going to Switzerland immediately afterwards.'

'I wish I were going with you,' he said. 'But I shall be too much occupied.'

'When are you returning home?'

'I can't say.'

She looked at him fixedly. She had her suspicions.

'Margaret is becoming famous,' she observed.

'Indeed!' said Henry, stretching forth his right leg and carefully shaking the knee of his trouser.

'Yes. She has published that tract, and the medical and maternal world is in fits of joy. It is selling like wild-fire.'

'O yes! I've seen it advertised,' said he.

'Have you seen Margaret lately?' asked Cecily.

'Well, I've been in town some time, you know,' he replied.

'But had you seen her shortly before you left Bartropps?'

'Yes. I saw her the day before.'

'And how was she?'

'Oh, she seemed all right.'

'Quite got over her illness, I suppose?'

'I suppose so.'

'What an extraordinary girl she is! No one else would have thought of going on the lake on a cold spring night, ---and all alone too!'

'Well, she suffered for her imprudence,' said Henry.

'People are saying she begins to look old,' remarked Cecily.

'Do they?' said he.

'I've heard it said. I suppose you don't think so?'

'Well, no. At least, it never struck me.'

'But then you admire her so much?'

'*Cela va sans dire*, Cecily.'

'She is very beautiful,' said Cecily. 'But I do think she is a trifle stupid. Her bringing-up has made her ridiculously odd. I wonder if she will really keep to her resolution and never marry!'

'I can't answer for ladies,' said Henry, shaking out his left knee.

'You might answer for *me*,' remarked Cecily.

'Answer for you! What, are you going to marry Regie after all?'

'No, sir, I am not. But when the right man asks me, I am going to marry *him*.'

She was smiling, full of animation, gaiety, piquancy. Henry thought that she was extremely pretty.

'The right man!' echoed he. 'The fellow who wasn't behaving well? Then he *is* behaving well, eh?'

'I hope so,' said she, demurely.

'Well, let me know in time, so that I may get you a nice wedding-present.'

'There's only one wedding-present that I should accept from you,' said she.

'And what is that?'

'Never mind. When I tell you the right man has asked me, I'll tell you what the present is to be. It's not an expensive one, or uncommon. You can get it anywhere.'

'It's a riddle,' said he.

'Perhaps it is,' she rejoined.

'Let me try and guess it. Give me another hint.'

She shook her head.

'When I'm engaged to the right man, you'll guess quick enough,' she said.

'But I want to guess now. It amuses me. Let's play the old game of twenty questions. Is it alive?'

'No.'

'Animal, vegetable, or mineral?'

'Mineral.'

'Precious?'

'Precious.'

'And yet not costly?'

'No.'

'And quite common?'

'Quite.'

'Everyone has it?'

'Well, it's ~~always~~ a wedding-present.'

'To the bride or to the bridegroom?'

'To the bride—in England.'

'An article of jewellery, then?'

'Yes.'

'But not expensive,' said he, musingly. 'Then it can't be a brooch, or ear-rings, or a necklace. A gold thimble? But no. A gold thimble isn't given to *every* bride.'

'No. Not a gold *thimble*,' said she.

‘But a gold *something*?’

‘Yes.’

‘I believe you are fooling me, Cecily. It’s something I know nothing about—some ridiculous pin you stick in your hair?’

‘No.’

‘What is it, then?’

‘You haven’t asked twenty questions and I sha’n’t tell you. It doesn’t the least matter. If I’m ever married, you will know.’

‘But is it square, Cecily?’

‘How persevering you are! No. It is *not* square.’

‘Round, then?’

‘Yes.’

‘It *sounds* like a wedding-ring,’ said Henry, meditatively. ‘But you can’t mean that. The bridegroom provides that, child.’

‘Yes. I know the bridegroom provides that,’ said she.

‘Then I give it up,’ he said.

‘Yes. Give it up,’ said Cecily, sighing involuntarily.

‘But you might tell me, my dear.’

‘No,’ she said, firmly. ‘I shall *not* tell you. But you may think about it, and try and guess it, if you like.’

So these two were reconciled, and Henry, seeking the charms of society again, met Cecily often, and she was always pretty, and piquante, and well-drest, and she constantly said daring things, which amused him.

‘Why didn’t I fall in love with her?’ he found himself thinking one night at a ball.

Then Lord Bolton suddenly got better, and, for the time being, Henry’s chances of obtaining a seat in Parliament seemed gone.

‘It certainly is ill waiting for dead men’s shoes, my Minimy-my,’ he said, flying to Mrs. St. Roque and her stepdaughter for sympathy.

‘O my dear boy, I’m so sorry,’ cried Mrs. St. Roque. ‘Indeed, it’s a dreadful disappointment to us all. Mamma will feel it terribly. The whole county will feel it. No one else is so influential. Of course, the Jermines might have been. But then Margaret is a girl, and that makes all the difference. She *is* influential, dear pet! But of course she isn’t a direct political influence. Oh, I’m very

sorry, my dearest Henry—*very*!’ cried St. Roque’s devoted wife, oblivious that Lady Bolton had been shedding tears of joy over her husband’s convalescence, and that her sons and daughters had dispersed to their homes with light hearts, because their father was spared to them.

Then another visitor came in, and Cecily and Henry drew aside.

‘It’s a horrid bore,’ said the former. ‘We went to inquire after the poor old fellow yesterday, and when we heard he was better, I said—but perhaps I’d better not tell you what I said. You might be shocked.’

‘Oh no, my dear. Nothing you say ever shocks me,’ said Henry. ‘What was it?’

‘Well, I only said, Bother the old boy! It wasn’t very bad. Was it? But mamma said it was awful, and so it was, in one way, because he’s a nice old creature and has always been awfully kind to me. Of course, I didn’t want him to be ill. But it does seem hard, when you are young, and a Gladeshire man, and Lord Bolton has nothing to do with Gladeshire at all——’

Henry laughed.

‘You’re a very good partisan, my dear,’ he said. ‘When I do stand for somewhere, you shall come and help me to canvass. Will you?’

‘Willingly, willingly!’ she cried.

Her eyes sparkled.

‘Then that’s a bargain,’ said he. ‘You mustn’t forget.’

‘No, no! Trust me,’ said she.

‘If you are not married to the right man first,’ added Henry. ‘He might object, you know.’

‘Oh, he won’t mind. I *promise* you, he won’t mind my canvassing for *you*!’

‘I believe you’d really like to help me!’ said Henry.

‘I should ~~like~~ I should like nothing better.’

‘You queer child! I believe you really like me.’

‘Well! Suppose I do!’

‘It’s awfully kind of you,’ he said.

‘Oh no,’ she returned, carelessly.

But her heart beat fast.

‘Awfully kind,’ he repeated. ‘Sometimes I think I’ve been a fool not to fall in love with you, Cecily. I believe once you’d have accepted me!’

'Suppose you try now?'

'No, thank you, my dear. I don't like being refused.'

'Have you been refused?' she asked.

'I shouldn't choose to be refused,' he said, evasively.

Then she knew that her suspicions were correct, and that Henry had offered his love to Margaret and that Margaret had rejected it.

'No,' she said, quietly. 'Don't be refused. It's not good for you. It's not good for any one. As to Regie, my refusals have ruined him. He has become idiotic. You are proud, and a refusal would embitter you. Don't risk it. Give your mind to politics, and let me canvass for you.'

'Till you marry?' he said. 'Then I shall lose you.'

'Always, Henry. I told you my husband wouldn't mind my canvassing for you.'

'Why, Cecily!' he exclaimed.

Then he stopped abruptly. He drew himself up, put both hands to the collar of his coat and adjusted it.

'You are making fun of me,' he said.

'Oh no, I wasn't,' said she. 'It's only my way to play round the *grand sérieux*, you know.'

Then she suddenly turned away from him and joined in the conversation which was going on between Mrs. St. Roque and the other caller.

'I'm going abroad,' she presently heard Henry saying to her stepmother. 'If you are going to Switzerland, I dare say I shall join you somewhere, if I may. I will write.'

'We shall be delighted,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'Yes. Pray come. Are you going home before you start?'

'I'm afraid I can't manage it,' he said, thinking of Ule.

'I've told Mrs. Minimy I'll try and come for the pheasants.'

Then he departed.

'Good-bye, Cecily,' he said, holding her hand for an instant. 'We shall meet soon in Switzerland, I hope.'

CHAPTER XXII.

DR. WHEBLE had never entertained his friends *en masse* since he came to reside at Gladestreet House. But on the occasion of his niece's wedding he extended his hospitality to half the county. A select party was bidden to witness the ceremony in the church and to return with the bridal pair to partake of breakfast, and every one with whom Wheble was acquainted was invited to come in the afternoon to eat wedding-cake and to see the presents.

'Yes, it is over,' said Mrs. Minimy, who had been at the breakfast, to Mrs. and Miss Velvetine, who arrived soon after the bride and bridegroom had departed. 'Dear Isabee looked charming—no tears. Indeed, no one shed a tear. You see, Miss Ovid has Margaret, and Dr. Wheble, affectionate as he is, isn't exactly Isabet's father. Poor man! he will be very lonely. But I hear he is going on a visit to Ule.'

'Indeed!' remarked Flora. 'I shouldn't wonder if he stayed at Gladestreet House. I'm not at all sure that he isn't meditating a change. He has been talking a great deal about bridal subjects of late, I assure you.'

'In relation to Isabee, of course,' said Mrs. Homer.

'Not altogether. He has taken to calling very much at our house lately,' Flora went on. 'I don't know why he should do so, unless——'

'Why, my dear, Mr. Primulum has been away, and Dr. Wheble has been taking his practice,' said Mrs. Homer, uncompromisingly.

'But I haven't been ill,' said Flora.

'No. But your mother has,' asserted Mrs. Homer.

‘Besides, I thought it was you who said Dr. Wheble was going to marry Miss Jerminé?’

‘I thought Margaret Jerminé had designs on *him*,’ said Flora. ‘She likes to be unlike other girls, and it would be quite unlike any other girl to wish to marry a man as old as Dr. Wheble. Of course, it would be different for *me*. But Margaret has no sense of the fitting, and all she cares for is to be talked about. She courts notoriety.’

‘Flora!’ exclaimed Mrs. Minimy.

‘She does,’ asseverated Flora. ‘All her actions prove it. Even her illness in the spring was brought on by her wilful eccentricity. The idea of any one going boating at midnight! My opinion is that she planned the whole thing in order to pose before Dr. Wheble as an interesting invalid. She is artificial to the back-bone.’

‘O Flora!’ repeated Mrs. Minimy.

‘But she is,’ persisted Flora. ‘Why else did she write that unheard-of tract, if she didn’t want to make herself notorious? A modest, shrinking girl would never have done such a thing. But she has published it without shewing the least embarrassment, and now all sorts of doctors are distributing it among their patients in a way *I* shouldn’t like at all. To my mind, notoriety among doctors is anything but enviable—indeed, I don’t call it nice. Of course, if a doctor knows a girl has written about stays in the unblushing manner Margaret has done—and with diagrams, too!—he knows that she knows all about the internal arrangements. And I say it’s horrid. A nice girl doesn’t wish to know how she is made, and a nice doctor *appears* not to know. But of course, if she *tells* him she knows, he can’t dissemble any longer. I must say this girl has outraged public decency altogether. I shouldn’t wonder if she were actually to do what Mr. Primulum wants her to do.’

‘What is that?’ inquired the other ladies.

‘Why, he wants her to write another pamphlet,’ said Flora. ‘The subject of this one is disgusting. So like Mr. Primulum! I just went in yesterday to see how they all were after the journey, and Mr. Primulum came in, quite elated at the success of the nasty *Physiology of Corsets*. You know it was he who persuaded the girl to publish it. And then he told me what he wanted her to do further. I snapped him up pretty quick, you needn’t doubt. But he is so

thick-skinned—nothing quenches him. He went talking on, lauding Margaret Jermine to the skies, till I felt quite upset.'

'But what is to be the subject of the new pamphlet?' inquired Mrs. Homer.

Flora looked cautiously around. Then she leaned forward.

'*Stomachs*,' she said, in a very small voice.

'Oh, is that all?' returned Mrs. Homer, cheerfully.

'It couldn't well be more disgusting,' said Flora, sharply. 'However, I've made up my mind to speak to Dr. Wheble about it. He said he shouldn't relinquish mamma's knee to Mr. Primulum, and I shall see him constantly. Besides—But never mind! I won't antedate.'

'I wonder you like to mention such a disgusting subject to Dr. Wheble,' remarked Mrs. Homer.

'I should approach it, of course, with the greatest delicacy,' said Flora. 'When there is an understanding between people, a hint is enough.'

Then she got up, nodding and smiling, and left the elder ladies. Mrs. Velvetine was dozing.

'What a ridiculous girl that is!' said Mrs. Homer. 'She marry Dr. Wheble indeed! Quite preposterous!'

'I wish she wasn't so ill-natured about Margaret,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'No one heeds her. But still it's a pity. Margaret is as modest as possible, and even if she were to put her name to a pamphlet about the digestive parts, I should feel she did it with an undeniably good aim and in the spirit of refinement. No doubt the organs of children ought to be known about, and I'm sure she wouldn't say anything disagreeable. She might even draw a veil over the unpleasant idea by using French terms. The French language is so useful for adorning things that are rather shocking.'

Then Cecily came fluttering up in her bridesmaid's dress.

'Hasn't it been delightful?' she cried. 'Didn't Isabee look a darling? Did you ever see such a pretty dress, Mrs. Homer? Mamma arranged it all. What a pity Henry isn't here, Mrs. Minimy! Mamma heard from him this morning. He talks of joining us at Unterlachen. Ah, there's Margaret!'

. She darted off again. Mrs. Homer followed her with her eyes.

'Miss Jermine looks pale,' she said. 'I don't believe she has quite got over that nasty attack. A sort of marsh fever, wasn't it? She begins to age. She looks quite thirty, I think.'

'It's the responsibility,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'Now she's going to write a manual of Political Economy for labourers. I wrote and told Henry about it, and said I thought it might have come from his pen. But he has more stirring interests. He meant to have stood for South Gladeshire, if poor dear old Lord Bolton hadn't recovered. He was at death's door, you know, and Henry would just have stepped in.'

'He ought to marry,' said Mrs. Homer, thinking of her fourth daughter. 'I wonder he admires neither Cécily St. Roque nor Miss Jermine.'

'He thinks dear Margaret is rather learned,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'Of course, he admires her. All men admire her. But he doesn't quite like blues. No. He never thought of Margaret, I'm sure, though they are excellent friends and often meet. In fact, Margaret will never marry. She has a prejudice against it.'

'Oh, Margaret, I've hardly seen you!' cried Cécily, drawing her friend away. 'You looked lovely at the wedding, dear. You very nearly cut out the bride! But didn't she look nice? As to Mr. Cleve, I thought he'd have smiled himself into next week! He was one broad grin all the time. Men do look idiotic at their weddings, I must say. Either they grin, like Mr. Cleve, or they look sly, like Bertha Homer's husband. He did look such a ninny. My goodness, how thankful I was I wasn't a Miss Homer, when I saw him kissing the bridesmaids! When I marry, I'll do it quietly. A couple of hansom cabs will do for me. No St. George's, Hanover Square, with rice thrown in your eyes, and girls giggling, and men making stale jokes, thank you! I know a little church I'll go to, quite in the background. I won't have people staring at me and my bridegroom, to see how we behave. Not even *you*, Margaret!'

Margaret smiled.

'When is this ceremony going to take place, dear?' she asked.

‘Can’t say,’ said Cecily, nodding. ‘But *some* day, and Regie won’t be the bridegroom. What about yourself, Margaret?’

‘About myself?’ repeated Margaret.

‘Yes. Are you still determined not to marry?’

‘Yes.’

‘Not if the very nicest man in the world asked you?’

‘Not in any case, Cecily.’

‘Well, I suppose it’s your *raison d’être* to write pamphlets. *The Physiology of Corsets* has quite brought down the house. One reviewer called you a practical and earnest-minded woman, and another prophesied that you’d become a salutary influence. There’s a glorious mission for you! And now I hear you’re going to instruct the clod-hoppers in the principles of Political Economy. Why, you’ll become a great national power! Papa told several people about it, and they all said that such a book as you design, well executed and zealously circulated, might decide the issue of the next election.’

‘Dear Cecily, I didn’t know you could speak so long a sentence without slang,’ said Margaret, smiling and blushing.

‘They did, upon my honour!’ cried Cecily. ‘Papa says you’re a brick. Have you begun your book?’

‘Yes.’

‘And is it as easy as ABC?’

‘It is easy. I read it to the children, and if they understand it, I am satisfied.’

‘And when will it come out?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘You must work hard. Remember, it is to turn the scale of the next election, and that may come upon us before we are aware. Of course, North Gladeshire will return papa as usual, and I don’t hope—if dear good old Lord Bolton *should* have passed away—that Henry will get in for South Gladeshire. But he’s an unknown man, and the seat will be contested. We must give him all the help we can. You mustn’t do anything to undermine him.’

‘I sha’n’t undermine any one who believes in Evolution,’ said Margaret. ‘I am only going to show, in plain words, that natural causes precede natural consequences, and that certain outcomes are inevitable.’

'Henry is a Conservative,' said Cecily.

'I care nothing about parties,' said Margaret. 'My theory of government is based on common sense.'

'You're awfully wrong!' cried Cecily, earnestly. 'If you lived among politicians, as I do, you'd know it. You *must* belong to a party. Common-sense is fiddle-sticks!'

'Well, Wheble, I congratulate you,' Primulum was saying to his host, at a little distance. 'Mrs. Cleve made a charming bride. I've never seen a more charming one—except my own.'

Wheble only grunted. But Primulum understood him and went on.

'My wife will miss her very much,' he continued. 'However, it would have been worse a year ago. Now she's got Miss Jermine, and that's a friendship to be proud of. I admire Miss Jermine excessively. There's something magnificent about her. Just look at the fine simplicity of the pamphlet on the corset! Even a child could understand it, and I hope it's made many an ignorant woman weep. Now, I'm trying to persuade Miss Jermine to follow it up. I want her to write a series of tracts, on food and exercise, and various other things. She has a clear, concise way of putting things that can't fail to go home. I look upon her as the regenerator of society. All children ought to bless her. Unborn generations will, that's very certain. She's an absolute mother to the human race.'

'Tut, tut, not so fast,' said Wheble. 'You're an enthusiast, Primulum.'

Nevertheless, he smiled.

'Oh, say I'm an enthusiastic ass,' said Primulum. 'That's what you would have said, you know, if it hadn't been Mrs. Cleve's wedding-day. I don't mind. Life would be pretty monotonous to a country doctor, if he hadn't enthusiasm. Now, look here, Wheble! Without flattery, could the case have been stated more succinctly than it was by Miss Jermine in *The Physiology of Corsets*? You must own that a better argument better put is impossible.'

'I never said it wasn't,' growled Wheble.

'No. But I want you to help me with Miss Jermine. She thinks so much of your opinion. You tell her a companion-pamphlet on *Juvenile Stomachs* would do good, and she'll write it.'

'My good fellow, she'll write it, if she thinks fit,' said Wheble. 'Miss Jermine isn't one of those dolls who want to run over the crossings behind a man. She has more sense in her little finger than half the men in the world in their whole bodies.'

'But about the *Juvenile Stomachs*——' began Primulum.

'Oh, confound your juvenile stomachs!' exclaimed Wheble. 'Miss Jermine is busy writing a few plain words on Political Economy for the masses. Leave her alone, while she is at one good work.'

'But *Juvenile Stomachs* is so very important,' sighed Primulum. '*The Physiology of Corsets* ought to be followed up. It *is* such a pity not to go on with the series. Somebody else may seize on the idea who couldn't do it half as well.'

'I can't interfere with her,' said Wheble. 'One can't interfere with people so much above the average as she is. When she came home last year, it was suggested to me to try and put a stop to her friendship with the Ifes. If I had, Ife would have been dead by now, instead of which, Red Oaks is a paradise. Ife is becoming a useful member of society, and Mrs. Ife is getting quite pretty. Depend upon it, people of Miss Jermine's calibre know what they are about, and the less they are tutored, the better for the world.'

At this moment, Flora Velvetine and Pinington came up.

'A warm day!' said the latter, nervously.

'It's been a very memorable day,' simpered Flora. 'What a pretty bride dear Isabce made, Dr. Wheble!'

'I'm glad you thought so,' said the uncle.

'Such a pity Mr. Cleve is so stout!' continued Flora, affectedly.

'My dear Miss Velvetine, Lucius Cleve isn't over-stout,' said Primulum. 'I really don't think you know what a man of forty ought to be. Experience, you know—experience teaches. You must know men well before you are in a position to give an opinion about them.'

'Miss Velvetine wouldn't think of offering an opinion upon any subject with which she wasn't thoroughly conversant, I'm sure,' said Wheble, with great gravity. 'Let us ask her about Miss Jermine's literary labours. I should think, Miss Velvetine, that you and Mr. Pinington must be proud of

your whilom pupil. I suppose you have heard that *The Physiology of Corsets* is in its thirtieth edition ?'

A faint colour rose in Flora's sallow cheeks.

'Indeed !' she said, looking down, and describing a little circle on the ground with the toe of her boot. 'It is not a subject in which I take much interest. Poor Margaret Jermine is an odd girl—a dear girl, of course, but certainly peculiar. I never taught her anything doubtful, and I am sorry that she has established this notoriety for writing on dubious subjects. It really wasn't my fault. I never encouraged her tastes. Once, when she was quite a child, she startled me one day at dinner by saying, "Miss Velvetine, will you cut off all the meat of the chicken, and leave its bones standing ? I want to see its skeleton." Wasn't it horrid ?'

'But did you do it ?' asked Primulum.

'Do it !' echoed Flora. 'No !'

The three gentlemen laughed.

'I feel very proud of Miss Jermine,' said Pinington. 'She is a very accomplished scholar, and a most sweet lady, and always begs me to call her by her Christian name. But she has resigned *Physiology* for the moment, Wheble. She is busy with *Political Economy*. She was very pretty over it, and she and I had a long conversation on some of the knottiest points. But she was never bewildered. I'd sooner talk to her than to any man I know. Her information is so varied, and her grasp so large. Hers is a very high order of intelligence.'

'She is a woman who will leave her mark on the world,' said Primulum.

'And on juvenile stomachs,' added Wheble, with a sly glance at Flora.

At the bottom of the garden was a thick belt of rhododendrons, behind which was a wide, grassy path, commanding a pretty rural view, and completely screened from the house. Hither Regie Dryad had lured Cecily. As they entered the walk at one end, Miss Hathe and Mr. Tally left it at the other.

'What a brute that man is !' said Cecily. 'Why doesn't he propose to that poor thing ?'

'I'm sure I don't know,' returned Regie. 'She's rather plain, isn't she ? I don't admire those terra-cotta complexions.'

Cecily laughed.

'That's rather a good remark,' she said, patronisingly. 'Yes. Louie Hathe is plain. But she's awfully good, and just suited to be a clergyman's wife.'

'Is she?' said Regie.

'Yes. And Mr. Tally wants a wife.'

'Does he?'

'Now, Regie, don't reply to me in that lamb-like way. You know I can't and won't stand it. Look here! I can't sit here all day. Just tell me what you brought me here for, and be quick about it. There are lots of people in the garden whom I want to see.'

'But I can't tell you in a hurry,' said he.

'Then let us go back.'

'No, no. Wait a little, Cecily. I wanted to remind you that I've been very patient. I've said nothing for a long time.'

'Oh! Is that it? Well, you *said* nothing. I admit that. But what have you not *looked*, sir? What have you not *acted*?'

'I can't help showing that I love you, Cecily.'

'You poor old goose, I suppose you can't! Well?'

He looked at her doubtfully.

'Dear Cecily, no man could possibly love you as I do,' he said.

'No, sir. I dare say not. But I might easily love another man more than I do you.'

He was silent.

'Did you really inveigle me down here merely to propose to me?' asked Cecily.

'I thought——,' he began.

'How stupid of you!' she cried. 'You might have known I wasn't in the humour for it. I don't suppose I shall ever be in the humour for listening to you. You'd much better go and marry some one else.'

'No,' said he, firmly.

'My dear Regie, why will you be so pig-headed? There's no special virtue in me.'

'You don't know what love is, my dearest,' said he, quietly.

'Don't I? And pray, how do you know what I know, or what I don't know? I know one thing, sir—I know what

love is to you ! It's a case of lose one, find another. How about mamma, my friend ?'

'That is a very old jest, Cecily, and one which pains me. But I presume you don't care about that.'

He spoke sadly, and Cecily's heart was touched.

'Indeed, I didn't mean to hurt you,' she said, gently. 'Please forgive me, Regie. Only I do wish——'

'That I would leave you alone?' he said, smiling. 'You don't know what a stake I am playing for.'

'No. I don't,' avowed Cecily. 'I don't think I am worth playing for, if you mean me by the stake. I know what I'm worth. I *am* worth one man's love. But that man isn't you.'

Regie sighed.

'Shall I tell you why I'm worth that one man's love?' said she.

He bowed assent. He could not speak.

'It's a great secret,' proceeded Cecily. 'No one knows, and if I tell you, you must feel honoured by my confidence, and also you must feel in honour bound not to worry me any more. I am worth that man's love, Regie, because I love him.'

Still Regie did not speak.

'I love him with all my heart,' said Cecily. 'I love him so much that I'd go with him to the antipodes and never think of papa and mamma or any one else again. I should snap my fingers at the whole world, if he loved me ! Now, do you see, Regie, why you bore me ?'

Regie's head was bowed upon his hands, and he did not reply. She laid her hand gently upon his arm. At her touch, he sprang aside.

'Don't touch me, don't come near me !' he exclaimed, wildly. 'I cannot endure it. You unman me ! You have stung me—stabbed me ! Don't come near me ! I might kill you in my longing. You don't know what a man's love and longing are !'

She did not. But his sudden ardour drew a veil from between her maiden isolation and the tumultuous hearts of men. For an instant she wavered, looking at his passionate face. She knew well that Henry Bartropps would never love her as this man loved her. But, like many another woman, she desired above all things that her own power of loving might be satisfied.

'Regie, you frighten me,' she said, moving a little away from him.

'Do I, my little love?' he cried. 'Nay then, forgive me! But let us part, child, or Heaven only knows what terrible thing I may not some day do in my sorrow!'

'Please, Regie, won't you be reasonable?' said she, softly.

'I will be anything you like, my dearest,' he replied. 'Only let us part! You love some one else. That is enough. Let me go.'

'But, Regie, you are unkind,' pleaded she. 'I meant— Won't you—? Mightn't it be——'

'You meant to play with me,' said he, with a sternness of which Cecily had not deemed him capable. 'Nay, my dear, I am man enough to resent that. No, no! Love whom you will, child. I shall not offend you again. You need not fear.'

'But, Regie, you *do* offend me. What did you think I was going to say?'

'I don't know. But I will not share your favours with any man. It is enough for me that my case is hopeless. I love you, my dearest, with a love of which you cannot dream. But I will have no other man's leavings.'

For a moment Cecily did not speak. Then she looked at him with blazing eyes.

'You are mighty particular for yourself, Mr. Reginald Dryad,' she said. 'You seem to forget that all *you* offer *me* is my stepmother's leavings!'

Then she arose and walked proudly away.

'So it was a very charming affair from beginning to end,' concluded Mrs. St. Roque, who had been giving an account of the breakfast to Mrs. Ife. 'Didn't Isabee look handsome?' she added, turning to Mrs. Primulum. 'The only thing which spoils it for me was the thought of poor Flora Velvetine.'

'It's much better for Mr. Cleve as it is,' said Mrs. Ife. 'I'm not at all sorry.'

'Nor I,' said Mrs. Primulum. 'Papa says if any fool ever gives his name to poor Flora, he'll give him a strait-waistcoat as a bridal offering. He declares he'd want it in a week. He thinks very seriously of poor dear Flora's temper, and he says, if he had time, he'd follow up her pedigree, and he says

he's sure he should reach a few lunatics before long. He wouldn't have let the children grow up under her charge for thousands of pounds.'

'They are going to Ule, are they not?' said Mrs. Ife.

'Yes,' replied Mrs. Primulum, with satisfaction. 'They are going in September. Miss Jermine is so clever. Papa thinks very highly of her. You've heard how *The Physiology of Corsets* has reached its thirtieth edition, Mrs. St. Roque? Well, now papa is urging her to write another little tract on —on children's stomachs,' she said, sinking her voice. 'He told poor Flora about it, and she was so disgusted. I couldn't help laughing. She writhed in that peculiar way of hers — papa calls it her unlunched agony. So he promptly asked her to lunch, and she stayed, though she was very angry with him, and told him he was coarse. But she never refuses the chance of a dinner, poor thing! And papa is very good to her. He always gives her a second help without asking her. He just says, "Now, Miss Velvetine, I've got a nice little bit here for you," and she just holds out her plate and goes on talking, and it doesn't *seem* as if she'd eaten much.'

'Mr. Primulum has so much tact,' said Mrs. St. Roque.

'Well, he says doctors must have tact,' said the wife. 'He says a doctor wants as much tact as anatomy. When he teases Flora he does it on purpose. You should have heard him talking about this new tract, and Flora scolding and writhing, and trying to blush. I told Miss Jermine about it, and she actually laughed.'

'But is Margaret really going to give her tract such an uncompromising name?' asked Mrs. St. Roque.

'I don't think so,' replied Mrs. Primulum. 'I think she will call it *The Children's Table*. Isn't she clever?'

'She is an angel,' said Mrs. Ife, fervently. 'She has begged my husband to write a Manual of Whist for Children, and he is extremely interested in it already. She is going to write a preface to it, saying, that as whist is such an intellectual game, it ought not necessarily to lead to gambling.'

'Really!' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'How that dear girl has come on! I couldn't have believed it. She's going to take charge of our children while we are in Switzerland. I couldn't have left them otherwise. Dear mamma would have had them. But she spoils them so. With Aunt Margaret they will be happy and good.'

‘I wonder how we all got on without her!’ remarked Mrs. Ife. ‘She is one of the most influential people in the county now.’

‘Papa says her intelligence is superb,’ added Mrs. Primulum.

‘And big Adrian says she is a representative woman,’ chimed in Mrs. St. Roque. ‘But *I* call her a dear!’

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE projected meeting in Switzerland never took place. In less than a fortnight after the departure of the St. Roques, Margaret wrote to say that little Adrian and his sisters had the measles. She was nursing them herself, she wrote, and Mr. Primulum was in constant attendance. Nevertheless, Mrs. St. Roque could not rest, and she declared that she must go home at once.

'You go on with Cecily and the boys, darling,' she said to her husband. 'I can go home by myself.'

But St. Roque said No to this. So he and his wife and daughter returned to England, and in process of time they took the little convalescents to Folkestone.

'Let us go to Folkestone and wait for the boys,' Cecily had suggested.

She was a good sister and loved her brothers well. But perhaps she thought of another man besides her brothers. Might not Henry land at Folkestone too?

Henry did land at Folkestone. He had been somewhat disappointed at not meeting the St. Roques in Switzerland, and, finding solitary travelling dull, he came back early in September. He wrote to Mrs. St. Roque ~~from~~ Paris.

'I shall cross on Monday,' he announced. 'And as you are at Folkestone, I shall stay there a few days.'

The letter arrived on Sunday, and that afternoon, Cecily, dressed in the most *piquante* of costumes, went out with her father, and on the Lees they suddenly met Regie Dryad. '

'Well, Regie, how are you?' said St. Roque, cordially. 'We haven't seen you for a couple of months I should think?'

'Not since Isabee Cleve's wedding-day, papa,' said Cecily, roguishly.

She was not resentful, and she had long ago forgotten her last and worst quarrel with her lover in Dr. Wheble's garden. Moreover, she had missed him. She liked his attentions. She basked in his admiration. She scarcely remembered the glimpse he had allowed her of his depth of feeling for her, and she thought of him again only as her lover, bound to feed her self-esteem and minister to her happiness. So she was glad to see him, and welcomed him with innocent railery.

'Where have you been?' she asked. 'Were you very angry with me? We *did* fight that day, didn't we? Oh, such a regular stand-up hand-to-hand, papa! Regie had the worst of it, of course. He always has with me.'

So she talked while her father was present. But by and by Mrs. St. Roque and the children joined them, and then Cecily invited Regie to walk with her towards Sandgate.

'Let us get out of the hubbub,' she said. 'I hate these Lees. It's the Row without any riding and without the London atmosphere.'

Regie accompanied her without a word. He looked, however, very grave. Cecily said nothing, till they had left the gay crowd behind. Then she turned upon him suddenly.

'Now, Regie, what are you harbouring ill-natured thoughts of me for?' she demanded.

He looked surprised.

'I am not harbouring ill-natured thoughts of you,' he said, slowly.

'That is rubbish. You are awfully angry with me,' she asserted.

'Pray, Cecily——,' he commenced.

'Be quiet,' she said, imperatively. 'I'm going to say my say and I won't hear a word from you. Do you know, sir, that it's eight weeks since we quarrelled? I have long ago forgotten all about it. What do you mean by keeping it on in this malignant way?'

'My dear Cecily!' expostulated Regie.

'Now, Regie, it's no use treating me to vague generalities. Any one can say,—“my dear Cecily!” I want you to explain your conduct. Why have you held aloof? Why have

you never written? Why were you away from 'Outwoods when we were at Beaulieu?'

'I thought——' he began.

'You shouldn't think. You should act. Did it never occur to you that when the children had measles, society would taboo me? You might have come to cheer me up.'

'I thought you didn't want me, Cecily.'

'And pray, why did you think that?'

'Well,——after what passed the last time we met——'

'How stupid you are, Regie! Why do you remember everything I say when I'm put out?'

'Didn't you mean it?' he asked, eagerly.

'Mean it! Mean what? I didn't mean to offend you, of course. But equally of course I meant to say No.'

He was silent.

'Poor Regie!' said she, after a moment. 'Did you really think I was going to retract all I've reiterated for years?'

'I don't think I understand you,' said he.

'Not understand me! And you a poet!'

'No. I don't think I understand you,' he repeated. 'But I know you torture me.'

'Poor Regie!' said she again.

'Don't mock me, my dearest,' he said.

'Don't call me your dearest,' she rejoined.

'I only speak what I feel, Cecily.'

'I dare say, sir. But it's not the custom of the world to speak what one feels. What if I am engaged to some one else?'

'Are you?' he asked. 'Tell me quick.'

'No. I am not——yet.'

They walked on a few paces before Regie spoke.

'Cecily, listen to me!' he said, at last. 'Let us come to an understanding. I love you, my dearest. More it is impossible for me to say. Look out at the sea, my sweet, and see how wide it is! Look up at the sky and see how deep it is and how great! And feel the earth beneath your feet, how firm, how strong! My dearest, my love for you is far, far wider than the sea; deeper, much deeper, than the sky; a million times stronger than the earth, and it is eternal. I mean what I say, Cecily, when I tell you you are the one love of my life, the only woman I have ever loved or ever shall love. I will not ask for your love again. It is

sufficient for me that you do not love me, and that I could not make you happy. But no other man will ever love you as I love you. And remember this,—if life or death should fail you, I am yours—I am yours.'

He spoke impressively, and Cecily could not laugh. Nay, she felt unwontedly that she was near crying.

'Don't, Regie,' she faltered. 'You are much too kind.'

'Too kind!' he repeated. 'My dearest, I love you.'

'Oh, Regie, it seems as if I were unkind!' she cried. 'You make me almost feel wicked. Why do you care for me so much?'

'I don't know,' said he. 'Not God—nor the universe—but *Love*—is the Unknowable.'

'Oh, Regie, if——' she began.

'Nay, Cecily,' he replied. 'There is no *if* in Love. You love, my dearest? Love on, then, and Heaven make you happy! I love too. There is a Love which is, and a Love which has. You cannot help it.'

'But I was awfully rude to you once, Regie.'

'You are pardoned, my queen.'

'Oh, Regie dear, how you love me!'

He stopped abruptly, standing in front of her and putting his hands on her shoulders.

'Don't be gentle!' he cried, in a voice that startled her. 'I love you always, my sweet one! But I can be a man when you are heedless. When you are kind, you kill me. Laugh at me, Cecily! Joke—say sprightly things that hurt—tease me—disdain me! But don't be tender-hearted—don't look at me with wet eyes. Be gay and chatter, and make merry at me! O Heaven!' he exclaimed, vehemently. 'If there be death upon the earth, let me be released!'

With an involuntary cry, Cecily sprang from him.

'Oh, Regie, you frighten me so!' she exclaimed.

'Frighten you!' he repeated, almost mechanically.

She looked fearfully over her shoulder. A long way off she saw two men coming along the cliff. Regie saw her gesture and smiled.

'Foolish child!' he said, tenderly. 'Did you think I should hurt you?'

'I thought you were losing your reason,' she said, frankly.

'My sweet, I was bidding you farewell,' he said. 'I must not see you again. Since hope is dead, sight must die too. Farewell, my princess, my pearl, my fair sweet rose, my one beloved!'

'Oh, Regie, you are too nice,' said Cecily.

He laughed discordantly.

'Nice!' he repeated. 'Nay, I am a fiend. But you don't know. Notwithstanding all the fools who have lingered at your side, you know nothing of men, my sweet maiden. You think you know so much, because of the pretty varnish that you see. But it is all outside, and you know nothing of the fire within, my pretty child. If you knew the half of the rage and the jealousy, and the strength of a despairing man's heart, you would be scared to stay with me here alone—you would fly from me, terrified—you would be petrified with fear—and when you could speak, your shrieks would rend the air and reach to the Poles! But you know nought, and you say my passion is—*nice*! Good heavens!—when a man's love is his *might*! But you are ignorant, my dearest, and God be thanked for it! Come,—let us go back!'

They walked back in silence. Cecily was awed. But when she had rejoined her family she recovered her spirits, and presently she began to feel somewhat displeased. In the evening she found an opportunity in which to tell her lover that he had outraged propriety.

'I don't want to make another scene, Regie,' she began. 'But were you mad this afternoon?'

'No,' he replied, gravely.

'Then why did you say such extraordinary things? In all my experience, I never heard any one talk such stuff in my life.'

'I dare say not,' said he, gently. 'I am a poet, dear Cecily, and you must forgive me.'

'Oh, because you are a poet!' cried she, piqued. 'I flattered myself you talked like a lunatic because you had some feeling for me.'

'So it was, Cecily.'

'Why do you say one thing, then, and mean another?'

'I mean both,' he said. 'I love you, and my love is a poet's love.'

'Oh!' ejaculated Cecily, ironically. 'Well, good poet,

I suppose you are aware you took some most unwarrantable liberties?’

‘Did I, Cecily? Did I press you to my heart till you died? Did I take you in my arms and jump with you over the cliff, so that no other man should see you again? Did I——?’

‘Hush, Regie! No. Of course not. Please don’t begin again. Remember, I am just a matter-of-fact girl and I don’t understand heroics. Not a word more! I only just wanted to know if you were mad.’

Then Regie bade farewell to his friends and told them that he was going to Greece, and that he intended to remain abroad for some time.

And Cecily retired to rest, somewhat subdued. For she was honestly sorry that Regie should love her so much, and she felt a certain amount of pity for herself.

‘Henry will never love me like that,’ she thought sadly. ‘I doubt if he *could* say such things as Regie said.’

But she arose the next morning, happy and hopeful. What did the heartache of her fantastic lover signify? Henry was coming—was to arrive that day. After all, Henry’s smallest favour was worth more to her than Regie’s worship.

St. Roque went to meet the Boulogne boat, and he invited Henry to dinner at 7.30. Henry appeared in Mrs. St. Roque’s drawing-room, neat and smiling. He presented a great contrast to Regie. The latter was beautiful, with a poetic and youthful beauty, such as Narcissus may have possessed, or Endymion when Diana loved him, or Adonis when Aphrodite favoured him among mortals. But Henry was in all points a handsome Englishman. He might lack Regie’s intellectuality and ultra-refinement. But he was essentially vigorous,—healthy, sensible, without fancies, without follies.

On this occasion, Cecily gave herself no airs. She smiled and was gracious. She was carefully dressed—not in satin and jewels—but with a dainty simplicity in a soft red gown, garnished with bunches of ribbons. Henry thought—as he had often thought before—that she was uncommonly pretty. After dinner, he found her in the verandah, reading. She laid down her book at his approach. He took it up. It was a novel.

'You don't read Herbert Spencer, I suppose?' he said, sighing involuntarily, and thinking of a spring day that was past and of another woman and a different book.

'I read Herbert Spencer!' exclaimed Cecily. 'I should think not. Why, nobody can understand him, can they?'

'Miss Jermine says she can,' said Henry.

'Oh, Margaret is wonderfully clever,' said Cecily. 'I don't pretend to be as learned as she is. In fact, I shouldn't like it. Learned people are bores, I think. And after all, we all know much the same. We don't want to go into all the stupid disputes of the *savants* to know that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other, and we all use syllogisms, whether we've studied logic or not. We can all see, without understanding the structure of our eyes. Can't we?'

'To be sure,' said Henry, laughing.

'Some people seem to think they know such a lot because they know *why*,' pursued Cecily, with animation. 'Now, practical knowledge does for me. I know *when* a kettle boils, and I don't care to know why; and I know I must breathe to live, and I don't care to know what my lungs are made of; and I know two parallel lines can't meet, without messing about for half an hour with ABC and QED. I learnt a little of all that at school, of course—just enough to show me it was all stuff. One of my school-fellows went to Girton and has taken wonderful honours. But what good has it done her? She's no older than I am and she looks thirty-five, and she stoops and wears spectacles, and she's awfully shy and can't speak a word. Now what on earth is the good of learning, if it doesn't make you agreeable?'

'What indeed?' echoed Henry, laughing again.

'Of course there are some legitimate studies for girls,' continued she. 'I call politics a legitimate study. Indeed, I think every woman *ought* to study them.' I do—very much.'

'You haven't forgotten that you've promised to canvass for me some day, Cecily?'

'Oh no.'

She smiled brightly.

'It's only a case of waiting,' said he. 'The general election must come, sooner or later.'

‘Yes, yes.’

There was a slight pause.

‘I saw Regie Dryad’s name down in the hotel-book,’ remarked Henry.

‘Yes,’ said Cecily. ‘He was here yesterday. He has gone to Greece.’

‘Did you send him, Cecily?’

‘I? Oh dear no! I don’t care what he does.’

‘But have you sent him quite away, I mean?’

‘I did that ages ago.’

Henry looked at her attentively. Then he bent towards her and spoke low.

‘Cecily, do you know that I proposed to Margaret Jerminé at Easter?’ he said. ‘No one knows but she and I. I’ve told no one else, and I don’t fancy she has. Did you know?’

‘No,’ replied Cecily.

Her lip was trembling. She was ready to burst into tears.

‘I did,’ he averred. ‘I proposed to her and she refused me. Never mind how or why. It’s all over. Of course, I felt it at first. Men do. It’s like a horse-whipping. It’s an indignity, as well as pain. But I’ve got over it—I’ve conquered it.’

Cecily made no rejoinder. She sat mechanically clasping her book with cold hands.

‘I don’t feel it now,’ said Henry. ‘The feeling has quite gone. She is nothing to me now. Only of course, Cecily, she *was* a good deal to me once. I can’t help that fact. It wouldn’t be honest to pretend otherwise.’

Still Cecily remained silent.

‘It wouldn’t be honest to pretend I never *had* cared for her,’ re-asserted he. ‘I don’t now—upon my honour I don’t. But I shouldn’t feel it fair not to own that I *did* care once.’

‘Margaret is so nice,’ murmured Cecily.

She could not say more. She was struggling with a great emotion and she restrained her tears with difficulty.

‘Never mind about her now,’ said Henry. ‘I told you, because it was only fair you should know. I wouldn’t take in any one, you least of all. I *did* care for Margaret, and I can’t help it. But that’s past. I’ve always been very, very

fond of you, Cecily. But I don't want to deceive you. I don't want you to imagine it's first love. I sha'n't love you less because I had a prior attachment. Only I hate the twaddle some fellows talk, pretending they've never had a thought for any one else in their lives. I don't believe it. I think it's idiotic. I'm *very* fond of you, Cecily. But I'd rather you knew all. Are you annoyed that I've told you?' .

She shook her head.

'We've always been friends,' he said. 'Will you be more than friends with me, Cecily? Will you be my wife, dear?'

Cecily was unfeignedly happy. She did not pretend that she had been won with difficulty, that she had yielded to importunity, that she was indifferent. Nay, she shocked her stepmother by her candour.

'I've been in love with Henry ever since I was eighteen,' she said. 'I always meant that this should happen. It has been a long game. But you see, I've succeeded.'

'Oh, my darling, don't say such things!' cried Mrs. St. Roque. 'My pet, I really don't like to hear you. You shouldn't, Cecily, indeed you shouldn't. It really isn't nice, my own girl. Suppose any one knew?'

'But I'm only saying it to you, mamma dear,' returned Cecily, laughing. 'Not that I care who knows! I'm very proud of being engaged to Henry.'

'But, my own sweet girl, you mustn't be *entêtée*—you really mustn't,' expostulated Mrs. St. Roque. 'It's a thing papa has a horror of. He says he can't bear to see a girl looking as if she thought hers was the only engagement that had ever taken place. Besides, darling, you really shouldn't let Henry see how much you care for him. You ought to be a little coy, dear girl—just a little. It doesn't do to let men too much into our secrets—it really doesn't. You ought to veil your delight a little, dearest pet.'

'But I can't, mamma,' said Cecily. 'I'm awfully happy and I don't care who knows it. Why shouldn't Henry know?'

'Well, dear darling, I don't know that I can give you an exact reason,' replied Mrs. St. Roque, puzzled. 'You see, my pet, men are men, and they're funny. I don't know why they're so different to us. But they are. They get sick of too much sweetness.'

'My dearest mamma, why are you always so delightfully sweet to papa, then?' demanded Cecily.

Mrs. St. Roque drew herself up.

'That's quite different,' she said, with a stately air. 'Your father is my own dear husband. It makes all the difference in the world whether a man is your husband or your lover. You can't love your husband too much, my pet,' she added, relaxing. 'But lovers should be kept at a distance.'

'Well, that's a thing I just can't do,' avowed Cecily. 'You mustn't expect it, mamma dear. I've been in love with Henry ever since I came out, and I've had to keep it in, and now that I needn't, you can't expect me to do it.'

So the next day she received her lover ecstatically. Her effusiveness made him feel uncomfortable. But it was impossible for him to say so, and he submitted to it. He was relieved, however, when it pleased her to perch herself on the window-sill, balancing herself on the point of one little foot, while she swung the other jauntily to and fro. As usual, she was charmingly dressed. Henry stood opposite to her, and surveyed her, smiling. She looked at him with devouring eyes.

'He is my king—he is a god among men!' she was thinking passionately.

'Yes. She is very pretty and elegant and taking. She will adorn Bartropps very much,' was the thought that passed through Henry's mind.

'I don't believe you are half as much in love with me as I am with you,' began Cecily.

'There is no need to discuss that,' said he. 'We should never come to a satisfactory conclusion, as love isn't a thing that can be gauged.'

'Well, it doesn't matter,' said she. 'I'm so, so happy, Henry darling!'

'Are you? I'm very glad,' he rejoined, smiling.

'Did you know I'd cared for you a long time, Henry?'

'No. How should I?'

'Well, I gave you some awfully broad hints,' said she, archly.

'Did you? But you were always so audacious, my dear, that I never thought you meant anything.'

'But did you *never*? Don't you remember my saying there was only one wedding-present I'd accept from you?'

'Yes. I tried to guess and couldn't. What was it?'

'You *did* guess, Henry darling! And then I thought you'd guessed all. You said it sounded like a wedding-ring, and you told me, as gravely as any judge, that the bridegroom always gave that. Well, that was what I meant!'

'Well, I never guessed,' he said. 'I suppose I was rather a duffer not to see. But I must make up for my stupidity now. When shall it be, my dear? When will you take possession of Bartropps?'

She did not answer immediately.

'What will Mrs. Minimy do?' she asked.

'Mrs. Minimy is my kindest friend,' said Henry. 'She has often begged me to marry. But how should you like to come to Italy for a few months, while she arranges her plans? Later on, if I get into Parliament, we mightn't be able to winter abroad. How would it suit you, Cecily, if I carried you off in November and we stayed away till May or June? Would you like it?'

'Oh, so much!' said Cecily, clasping her hands. 'We should be all alone together. It would be awfully nice.'

'We might do that very well, if you think you would like it,' proceeded Henry. 'I should like it, if you are sure you would. I know several people in Florence and Rome.'

'We sha'n't want *people*,' said Cecily.

'No, my dear. But we may as well go to places where we can have society if we wish for it. I shouldn't like you to say, like *Punch's* Angelina, that you'd like an enemy to drop in.'

'I thought it was Edwin who said that,' observed Cecily.

'Was it? Well, perhaps so. At any rate, it won't hurt us to be within the reach of a few people we know. We needn't see more of them than we like. Will you say November, Cecily?'

'Yes, dearest,' said she, gravely.

'What is the matter, my dear?' asked Henry. 'Have I annoyed you?'

'Oh no! Why do you ask?'

'You seemed suddenly melancholy.'

'Did I? It was only seeming. I'm awfully happy, darling.'

But she sighed involuntarily. She could not help thinking of Regie. Henry's matter-of-fact manner, and his ordinary phrases of endearment contrasted unfavourably with the

poet's wild and passionate worship of her. But in an instant she was shocked at herself, and her great love and loyalty to her affianced lover surged up in her heart. With a sudden impulse she sprang from her narrow seat and threw herself into Henry's arms.

'Oh, my darling, my darling!' she cried, almost sobbing.

He caressed her tenderly. For he was a young man, and she was a very pretty woman. But after a few moments he put her gently from him, and held her at arm's length.

'You queer little thing!' he said. 'What is it?'

'Nothing—only I love you so,' she said.

Her face was suffused with blushes. She struggled from his grasp and nestled to him again, hiding her burning cheek against his coat.

'Why, you're so little, and I'm so tall, you can't lay your head on my breast, as girls do in books,' said he, stroking her hair.

'Oh, Henry dearest, I love you so—I love you so!' she cried, almost wildly.

'My dear, you love me too much,' said he. 'I don't deserve it. I'm only an ordinary man, and I'm not worth such particular love. *Don't* love me so much, you dear little thing!'

And he sighed, thinking suddenly of Margaret, and of how she had wept and entreated him not to tempt her, and knowing—with a regretful pang—that if she had said and done only half that Cecily had said and done, his heart would have been ready to burst with uncontrollable joy. But he was a good man, and Cecily was his promised bride. Moreover, he was a proud man, and Margaret had affronted him. So he pressed Cecily closer to him, stooped, and kissed her.

'You mustn't love me so much, my dear,' he said.

Then Cecily recovered herself.

'I won't ~~show~~ it, sir,' she said, looking at him archly through her tears. 'I'll keep it to myself in future. Mamma told me to do so last night. She told me to be coquettish.'

'Yes. I like you to be coquettish,' said Henry. 'It suits you.'

'Very well, my lord. Anything to please you. Only remember, *I* like *you* to be my lover.'

'Naturally. How shall I show it, my dear?'

'First of all, don't call me—My dear.'

'What then?'

'Oh, that I can't dictate. Your own heart must tell you. If it doesn't, you must buy the *Etiquette of Courtship*.'

He laughed.

'I will. Meantime, my dear, what next?'

'Well, you ought to admire me.'

'Haven't I shown that by begging you to become Mrs. Bartropps?'

'You didn't beg much, Henry.'

'Well, you didn't give me the chance. You ought to have been coquettish then.'

'I couldn't be, darling,' said she, earnestly. 'I was so glad, and I couldn't help saying so at once. If I'd coquetted then, you might have gone away, and, Henry dearest, if you'd done that, it would have killed me!'

'Now, Cecily, you are breaking your very first promise,' said he. 'I told you not to love me so much. You really mustn't, my dear,' he concluded, impressively.

'I can't help it,' said she.

'But you must try, my dear girl.'

'Does it displease you?' she asked.

'Displease me! No, no. Nothing you do displeases me, of course. I wish it for your own sake, because I'm not a man of heroics. I can't be romantic. I love you, my dear. But I can't be sentimental over you.'

Cecily was silent for a few moments. Then she looked at him brightly.

'I shall have to talk slang again, I suppose,' she said. 'I thought it wouldn't be becoming in a married woman, so I was trying to break myself of it. But I foresee I shall have to go on playing the same old game.'

'Yes, do,' said Henry, eagerly.

'All right,' rejoined she. 'I'll get my hat and we'll go for a blow. Ta-ta for a minute. I like you awfully, you know,' she added, nodding her head, as she went towards the door.

He strode after her, laughing, and caught her arm. She struggled to release herself.

'Hands off, sir! No kissing!' she cried. 'There, you've crumpled my nice clean dress! I will *not* have it, sir! I don't choose to be kissed unless I like.'

Nevertheless, he kissed her, and was better pleased than when she had kissed him, and when he took her out, he felt proud of her.

‘Sha’n’t it be October?’ he asked her. ‘I want you to be Mrs. Bartrop’s.’

‘No,’ said Cecily, decidedly. ‘November—and the end of November too, sir! If we are going to Italy for six months, with lots of parties to go to at Rome and Florence, I must have some frocks, and I can’t have my frocks made in a month.’

So it was settled, and the love-making proceeded merrily. And Cecily appeared to be her usual self, with a little assumption of Mrs. Bartrop’s in embryo added; and Henry appeared to be his usual self, happier. But sometimes Cecily looked grave, and sometimes Henry sighed, and no one knew why.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MARGARET heard of the engagement from Mrs. Minimy.

'I hope they will be very happy,' she said, quietly.

But in her heart there arose a great bitterness. Was there no constancy in man? It was not six months since Henry had been wooing her. She knew little of the world and the world's ways. She had heard of marriages of convenience. She had not dreamed of marriages of pique. Then she reproached herself. Why was she angry? For had she not refused Henry and in the coldest and curtest manner?

'I beg your pardon, dear Mrs. Minimy. What were you saying?' she said, starting.

'You were engrossed with those dahlias, my love,' said Mrs. Minimy, who had asked her visitor to arrange some cut flowers. 'That was why I stopped. I thought you weren't quite listening. Henry has written me the sweetest letter, and Cecily too. Cecily seems wild with happiness. Indeed, Blanche writes she is too happy.'

'I don't think any one can be too happy,' said Margaret.

'Well, my dear, perhaps not,' rejoined Mrs. Minimy. 'But people show their happiness in various ways, and what Blanche means is, that dear Cecily is almost too outspoken. You see, the dear sweet girl doesn't attempt to conceal that she is very, very much in love.'

'Ought she to conceal it?' asked Margaret, abstractedly.

'Oh, my love, yes,' replied Mrs. Minimy. 'It's a great error to let men see everything. Coquetry is the heritage of women, and they ought to use it. I was always very dignified with my dear husband—before he was my husband I mean. After the wedding, he was quite surprised. He said he had no idea I cared for him so much. A woman

should always keep some of her charms in the background, and her greatest charm is her affectionateness.'

'I dare say,' said Margaret.

'Of course, it matters less in this instance,' pursued Mrs. Minimy. 'Henry must have been in love with Cecily for a long time. In fact, I begin to wonder it didn't happen sooner. But naturally young men know their own business best. They'll make a charming pair, won't they? She's a teeny bit short for him—that's my sole grief. I wish she had been taller. But she's so pretty, and she has good nails and pretty ears and nice teeth. She has all the essential points. I couldn't have picked out a more suitable bride for my boy. It would have worried me dreadfully if he'd married a stranger. I shouldn't have known a moment's peace till I'd seen her, and made sure she had no disadvantage. So few girls are altogether satisfactory. Now there are the Homers—pretty girls, all of them, except Mrs. Start—but then every one of them has one shoulder higher than the other. I noticed it at the Starts' wedding. Bertha stood near the bride, and the other three were just behind her—bridesmaids, of course—and there were the five sisters, each with the right shoulder slightly elevated. Such a terrible pity! It would have distracted me if Henry had fancied one of them.' And of course the Hathes were out of the question—so old and so ugly. No, I always said to myself, it must be Margaret or Cecily. And you, my dear, always declined to think of matrimony, so then I decided it must be Cecily. Oh, my dear, what a lot of flowers you've brushed down with your sleeve!'

'I am so sorry. I don't think they are hurt,' said Margaret, stooping to pick up the fallen blossoms. 'There! Now we can go on talking.'

'The wedding is to be in November,' Mrs. Minimy went on. 'The pair are going to Italy for the winter, and Henry has begged me to stay here and make my plans at my leisure.'

'He is always kind,' said Margaret.

'Always,' acquiesced Mrs. Minimy. 'You see, I took such pains he should grow up without any defect. I took the greatest heed of his figure and his teeth, and I taught him to be particular about his hair and his hands and the boots he wore. I always think good-looking people are

pretty sure to have nice tempers. It vexes a man to have a spotty face, or weak eyes, or a hobble. No one can be quite sweet-tempered who has corns, for instance. I took care Henry had nothing of the sort, and Blanche, too. And naturally, I was able to give some assistance with Cecily.'

'And you've helped me with my children,' said Margaret. 'I owe you a debt of gratitude for many a valuable hint.'

'Well, when you are famous, my dear, and some one writes your biography, you can beg them to say it was Mrs. Minimy who suggested to you to write the pamphlet on boots—the third pamphlet, I mean,' said the elder lady, with satisfaction. 'I shake my head rather at stays and stomachs. I consider them both rather dreadful subjects. But boots are different. Of course you must introduce corns, and that is a delicate subject, and not one to be mentioned everywhere or at all times. But mothers must consider everything, and after all, the toe—properly managed—is quite a nice, pretty part of the body. So you may say I approved of the boots, my love—or, at least, your biographer may say it.'

'But, my dear Mrs. Minimy, no one will ever write my biography,' said Margaret. 'Why should they?'

'Well, one never knows,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'At any rate, don't forget I impressed it on you that corns were unparalleled evils, influencing the whole appearance and the whole character for bad. I assure you, my dearest Margaret, I only say what is true. When I see a man walking lopsided and speaking irritably, I always say to myself, Corns! And I'm sure, in nine cases out of ten, investigation would prove I was right. Mr. Primulum quite agrees with me.'

'Yes,' said Margaret.

Then she went home, walking through the woods by herself. For the children had all gone blackberrying with Mademoiselle, and thus it had happened that Margaret, who was seldom unattended, had gone to Bartrop's alone.

It was a lovely afternoon and the atmosphere was warm for the time of year. The sun shone brightly and the sky was blue. The trees were still green, and the yellowing bracken was dry and stood erect. But Margaret wended her way sadly, perplexing herself with many thoughts, wondering whether Henry had ever really loved her, and, if he had loved her, whether he could now love Cecily; angry with

herself for doubting the truth of his passionate protestations in the spring and of his subsequent long and patient wooing of her, yet anon stung by the remembrance that what he had said when the leaves were tender was forgotten ere they had become sere. 'I shall never marry any one but you,' he had asseverated. And now, before a year had fled, he was about to marry Cecily. Margaret would have been more or less than a woman, if her heart had not been rendered sore by the news she had just heard.

'If he had only waited a little!' she thought over and over again.

Then she chode herself. Why should he wait?

'But oh, if he *had* but waited—just a little!' she thought again, in her inexpressible anguish.

Then a sudden turn in the woodland path brought her in sight of a group of her children, laden with baskets of blackberries. They were rosy with exertion, talking eagerly, dishevelled. One little frock was torn and had been pinned up. Mademoiselle came last, flushed and happy. A young man had joined the party and walked beside her, carrying her heavy basket. He was one of the young Homers. Lucius Cleve had put him into the Tag, Rag, and Bobtail Office, and he occupied the lowest seat in the last room of the Bobtail department.

'County nepotism doesn't do a man much credit,' Cleve had told Mrs. St. Roque, grimly.

For Gus Homer was not clever. But he was good-natured and punctual, and the work of the Bobtail office requires few brains. So he served his country contentedly, and when he came home for a holiday and found all his sisters married or engaged, he amused himself with the ladies of Ule. Mademoiselle was young and pretty, and he had taught her to skate in the winter. At Easter, he had helped her to decorate the little Catholic church at Gladesleigh, and had driven her there on the Sunday. During the summer, he had removed his lodgings to Brompton Square and had begun to frequent the Oratory.

'Brompton Square is more convenient for the office,' he had told his parents, who did not know London well.

Margaret beheld the two with a pang of irrepressible envy, which she instantly checked and for which she despised herself. She advanced to meet them gravely. But no one

remarked this, for she was often grave. The children flocked around her at once.

'Oh, look, Aunt Margaret!' cried one. 'See what beauties we've got! We shall be able to have *such* a large pudding.'

'Mademoiselle got a great bramble all round her,' said a boy. 'But Mr. Homer came up at the very moment and got it off.'

'Monsieur Omère arrived at the neeck of time,' explained Mademoiselle, blushing.

'We've had such a lovely afternoon, Miss Jermine,' said Gus. 'I *never* enjoyed anything more,' he added, looking down at the French girl's pretty, *piquante* face.

'Except teaching Mademoiselle to skate?' suggested Margaret.

'Oh, Mademoiselle!' cried the little girl whose frock had been torn. '*L'épingle a sautée—sortie*, I mean. Oh, Mademoiselle, it's come out.'

Mademoiselle stopped at once. Margaret and Gus walked on.

'Miss Jermine, do you mind my coming to Ule?' asked the young man.

'No, Mr. Homer,' replied Margaret. 'That is, if you are not flirting.'

'Flirting! No, indeed! Believe me, Miss Jermine, I only don't speak because—because I'm too poor.'

'What do your father and mother say?' asked Margaret.

'Oh, I don't know and I don't care,' he replied lightly. 'I'm not the eldest son. But even if I were, I should do just the same. Parents have no right to interfere with their children. I shall do as I like. They have nothing to do with my marrying.'

'No?' said Margaret.

Then he remembered to have heard that Mr. Jerminè had forbidden his daughter to marry, and, being a stupid young man, he stammered an apology for his inconsiderate remark.

'Oh, I forgot. I beg your pardon,' he faltered.

'Why?' she said coldly.

'Oh, I don't know,' he returned, confused. 'I thought—I understood—I mean, people say—'

'People say a great many very incautious things, Mr.

Homer,' said Margaret. 'Pray, what have they said to you?'

'Oh, I don't know,' he repeated nervously.

'Probably more than half that you have been told is untrue,' said Margaret, severely. 'You should never believe reports.'

'No, no,' said Gus, hastily.

Then they walked on in silence. Gus hoped that Mademoiselle would soon overtake them. Margaret was wishing that she had not fallen in with the merry blackberrying party. Her breast was swelling with an intense and overpowering irritation. She was deeply ashamed of it. But she could not dismiss it from her. The blushes of Mademoiselle hurt her, and the awkwardness of Gus smote her cruelly. The gladness of the little ones jarred upon her. For the first time in her life it seemed to her that it would be a satisfaction to perform some senseless deed of violence. She longed to retort upon the unconscious world for the grief that her father had wrought upon her.

'Aunt Margaret, I want to tell you something,' said a little fellow, running up, panting, and taking her hand.

She did not return his clasp.

'How sticky you are, my dear boy!' she said.

She thought that she spoke in her usual tone. But the child detected the underlying vexation and he slunk back.

'Aunt Margaret's in a wax,' he whispered to another boy.

'No, she's not, and that's flat,' said the lad to whom he had addressed his remark. 'She never is. Aunt Margaret *n'est jamais dans une wax, n'est-ce pas, Mademoiselle?*'

'*Fi-donc, Tom!*' cried the French girl. '*La tante n'est jamais fâchée, voulez-vous dire? Vous savez bien—*'

'She *is* in a wax,' repeated the first urchin, sturdily. 'I know by her face. Her forehead was all wriggled-up and her eyes were angry and her lips were shut up—so! And her voice sounded like our clergyman's voice when he says the Commandments. His name's Pole, and papa calls him North Pole.'

'What, what?' cried the other children, clustering round.

'*Taisez-vous, Gordonne*, exclaimed Mademoiselle. '*O, que vous êtes bête! Marchez, je vous prie!*'

'I say Aunt Margaret *is* in a wax,' asserted Gordon, stoutly.

'And I say she isn't, and I'll punch your head!' cried Tom.

'Let's ask her,' said the little girl with the pinned-up frock.

She set off running, and the others followed.

'Oh, Aunt Margaret——' she panted.

'Aunt—Mar—g'ret,' they all gasped.

Margaret turned round and looked unsympathetically at her excited following.

'What is it?' she inquired, in the tone that Gordon had stigmatized.

'Gordon says—you're in a—wax,' exclaimed several breathless voices.

'You aren't—are you?' said Tom. 'I said you never were.'

The children had given their beloved friend a home-thrust and she felt it keenly. But she was too noble-minded to resent it, and her eyes filled with tears.

'Not now, at all events,' she said, gently. 'Come and walk with me, my dears, and tell me all about everything. Where did you get the finest blackberries?'

'But she *was* in a wax,' said Gordon to his mother on the following Saturday. 'She looked just like North Pole.'

Now it so happened that Gordon's mother was in the habit of repeating the sayings of her little son, and she recounted the scene in the wood—as related by him—to several people, and when it reached the ears of Miss Velvetine, that lady put two and two together and laughed sardonically.

'Did you hear of Margaret Jermine's violent behaviour to Gordon Singleton?' she said to Mrs. Primulum. 'It was the day Cecily St. Roque's engagement was announced,' and I believe Gus Homer chose that afternoon for proposing to Mademoiselle. Poor Margaret! It was rather hard on her, no doubt. But she needn't have made the whole thing so very patent. I believe she boxed Gordon's ears.'

'My dear Miss Velvetine, pray stick to truth,' remarked Primulum. 'Miss Jermine never employs corporal punishment. Why do you always revile that charming lady? How has she offended you?'

'Do let me talk to Mrs. Primulum!' cried Flora. 'Surely it's a pity a girl should show her heart so plainly! I felt ashamed to hear she had made a scene just because Henry Bartropps was going to marry some one else. Mrs. Singleton says she stamped, and pushed the children about.'

'Indeed!' said Primulum. 'Well, we can soon verify that. Dorothy and Katie were both there. Here, children!' he called out to the little girls, who were walking on ahead.

The two little girls came running back.

'My dears, what is all this about your Aunt Margaret stamping and pushing you all about?' asked their father. 'Does she ever stamp her foot?'

'No, never,' cried Dorothy, with indignation.

'And does she push you about much?' continued the doctor.

'No, *no*,' cried Katie.

'And did she box Gordon Singleton's ears one day?'

'Oh, papa, *no*,' screamed they.

'Think again, little girls. It was the day when your Aunt Margaret had been to Bartropps and Mrs. Minimy had told her all about the grand wedding Miss St. Roque and Mr. Bartropps are going to have. Are you sure she didn't box any one's ears?'

'Papa, Aunt Margaret *couldn't*,' said Dorothy. 'She's *perfectly* good, and Mademoiselle says she's a saint. And we all had a row on the mere in honour of Miss St. Roque's engagement, and we are making a screen of scraps as a wedding-present, and Aunt Margaret does most of it.'

'Were you there on that memorable occasion, Miss Velvetine?' asked Primulum, with an air of simplicity. 'Do these little girls speak the truth? I must punish them, if they have wilfully distorted a statement.'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Flora, hastily. 'I can't stay now. I must be getting home.'

'Good-bye,' said Primulum. 'By the way, have you heard of Miss Jermine's next pamphlet?'

'What?' said Flora.

'Miss Jermine's new pamphlet. This is such a nice subject. Quite in your line, Miss Velvetine! I know you didn't like *Juvenile St*—— I beg your pardon, *The Children's Table*, I meant. But this——'

'Good-bye,' interrupted Flora.

And she began to hasten her steps.

'Come to lunch to-morrow, and then I'll tell you all about it,' Primulum shouted after her. 'It's about—CORNS!'

Then he turned to his wife, laughing heartily.

'I think I scored one that time,' he observed.

'But you tease her too much, dear,' said Mrs. Primulum, reproachfully. 'I really think you go too far.'

'I don't care,' said Primulum. 'It's only tit for tat. I'm only paying her back for her scandals about Miss Jermine. Fortunately nobody ever credits a word she says. Still, it's outrageous that she should say such things of a woman whose gloves she isn't fit to mend. If Miss Jermine ever did affect Henry Bartropps—and it isn't the least likely she ever did—Miss Velvetine should be ashamed to betray another woman.'

In truth, no one believed that Margaret had had any tender feeling for Henry. She had received the news of his engagement calmly. She talked of it openly and took a tranquil interest in it, and, as Dorothy Primulum had said, she made most of the screen which the children from Ule were to present to the bride and bridegroom. No one but Gordon Singleton knew that she had been deeply moved, and he was but nine years old and soon forgot it. Gus Homer confided to his *fiancée* that Miss Jermine had been irritable with him. But Mademoiselle had replied that Miss Jermine was adorable and had reproached her lover for his *bêtise*. Margaret pursued her usual avocations in her usual manner. She appeared to conceal nothing, and it seemed that there was nothing to conceal. She had said to two or three persons that she had nothing to do with love and marriage, and people began to believe that she meant what she said. She was superior to other young women and more than ordinarily sedate. Added to this, her social position gave her an unusual authority. People ceased to look upon her as a girl. They began to regard her as a middle-aged woman of considerable importance. It would have seemed foolish to most to connect Miss Jermine of Ule with a love story. So Margaret wrote her pamphlet on *Boots*, and instructed her labourers in the rudiments of Political Economy, and went in and out among her children, and no one guessed that her heart ached.

The St. Roques arrived at Beaulieu a fortnight before the day fixed for Cecily's wedding. The next day, Margaret received a little note from the bride-elect.

'Come and see me,' Cecily wrote. 'I'm awfully busy and don't see my way to getting to you. But do come to lunch to day, like a darling!'

So Margaret went. Cecily received her with open arms.

'You sweet dear thing!' she cried. 'Fancy your setting off at once! I've lots to tell you. Come up stairs with me. You'll see mamma at lunch.'

The two girls were closeted in Cecily's boudoir for an hour. Cecily talked much while she showed Margaret her presents and her new dresses. Margaret said little in reply. At last, the bride-elect paused. Then Margaret asked a question.

'Are you very happy, dear Cecily?' she said, with an unspeakable effort.

'Happy!' echoed Cecily, 'Oh, Margaret, I'm so happy I don't know what to do with myself. I don't suppose you can guess how happy I am.'

'No,' said Margaret, quietly. 'I dare say not. You know, I have nothing to do with love.'

Cecily threw herself upon the ground by Margaret's side and clasped her hands upon Margaret's knee.

'It's *such* a pity,' she said. 'Now I'm so awfully, awfully happy myself, I can hardly bear you to be unhappy.'

'But why should I be unhappy?' asked Margaret.

'Every one must be who doesn't know what love is,' returned Cecily.

'I'm glad you are so happy,' said Margaret.

'Do you know what I fancied once, Margaret?'

'No.'

'I had an idea you liked Henry. Because, of course, he liked you, and I didn't think any one could resist him. But I'm glad you didn't. I've loved him *such* a long time, and though I shouldn't have made a fool of myself, and of course I should have married Regie, I should have been wretched. I *am* glad you didn't care for him.'

'Even if I had, it would have made no difference, as I never intend to marry,' said Margaret, moving her knees restlessly.

'Do I hurt you?' asked Cecily.

‘Rather.’

Cecily removed her arms and rose.

‘I’m so awfully happy,’ she said again. ‘Henry is nice to the last degree. Of course he’s not a man to be passionately devoted. He is calm and self-contained. He’s not the sort of man to be madly in love and forget himself. He doesn’t care to be sentimental. He likes to talk to me about politics. He likes a woman to be clever. But he says he’s glad I don’t read Herbert Spencer and all that stuff. I like talking politics with him. But I sometimes wish he was a little more *compressé*. Do you know he hardly ever calls me anything but my dear?—and he used to do that before we were engaged. He laughs at me, when I call him things.’

She sighed, thinking of Regie. Margaret sighed too.

‘It’s an odd world,’ she said, half to herself.

‘It’s a very nice world,’ cried Cecily. ‘Remember, Margaret, I’ve told you all this in confidence. I don’t complain. I’m just as happy as a bird. Henry is perfect, and I am quite content, —*quite*.’

‘I am glad,’ said Margaret.

‘You wrote me such a nice letter, dear,’ proceeded Cecily. ‘It was long in coming. I began to think you were offended, because I hadn’t written to you myself. But when it did come, it was the jolliest letter I had. Henry liked your message to him. He said it was characteristic of you. I was a wee bit jealous, because I was called away in the middle, and when I came back Henry was reading your letter to himself, with his forehead wrinkled. So I just had it out with him. I said, “Are you hankering, sir?” He said, “Oh dear no, I should think not.” Perhaps I oughtn’t to have told you that, Margaret. But of course, it was a satisfaction to me. I knew *you* didn’t care. But I wanted to be sure he didn’t either.’

Then she flung her arms about Margaret and kissed her extravagantly.

‘No woman likes to be superseded,’ she thought. ‘She didn’t care for him. But I dare say she’d have liked him to wear the willow for her. I know I rather like poor old Regie to be inconsolable.’

Then the gong sounded and the two girls went down stairs. Henry had just arrived. Margaret had not expected to see him, neither had he expected to see her. But they

greeted each other calmly, and Margaret entered into conversation with her host and hostess, hardly seeming to notice the presence of the lovers. Neither of the latter addressed her. They seemed absorbed in each other, and Henry's attentions to Cecily were obtrusive. After luncheon, however, he sat down near Margaret. Her unmoved and stately demeanour somewhat annoyed him. To his mind, her dignified and unenvious exterior was something approaching to unwomanliness.

'How are your young people getting on, Miss Jermine?' he asked.

'Very well, thank you,' she replied. 'Mrs. Primulum's little girls are now added to my number.'

'Oh, indeed! And Miss Ovid?'

'She is quite well. We have persuaded Dr. Wheble to pay us a visit, and he is coming in a few days. If we can make him happy, he has promised to stay till Christmas.'

'I hear you have stimulated an engagement already,' said he.

'Mademoiselle and young Mr. Homer, do you mean? Yes.'

'Did you make the match, Margaret?' inquired Cecily.

'No.'

'But you encouraged the intimacy?'

'I didn't check it. That was all.'

'What word-splitting!' cried Cecily. 'If you don't check a thing you must encourage it. But you are a philosopher.'

'Well, it's a good thing there are some philosophical ladies in the world,' observed Henry, in a tone of patronage. 'Miss Jermine reforms the world. As for you, my dear, you are fit for nothing but to wear pretty dresses and preside at feasts. Isn't she a frivolous little goose, Miss Jermine?'

'Well, you know you like me as I am,' cried Cecily. 'You hate learned ladies—you've said so over and over again.'

'I hate learned ladies!' exclaimed Henry. 'My dear girl, what are you thinking of? Please excuse her, Miss Jermine. There's a popular notion that brides are always off their heads, and I begin to believe it. What do you think?'

'I don't know,' said Margaret.

Then she took her leave and went home. She was the daughter of a philosopher, and she was herself an eminently reasonable being. But she was also a woman, and a young and sensitive woman to boot. And it seemed to her now that

Henry Bartropps was supremely and insufferably insolent, and that Cecily was contemptibly childish and tiresome.

'He cannot forgive me,' she said to herself. 'But why does he take pains to hurt me?'

The next day she caused the rooms that her father had occupied to be opened and made ready for the use of Dr. Wheble. With her own hands she dusted the writing-table, and stocked its drawers with fresh stationery. Dorothy Primulum assisted her in this pleasant task, and the child's prattle amused the sad woman, and afforded her distraction.

'What a quiet room this is!' remarked the little girl. 'You never sit here, do you, Aunt Margaret?'

'No, my dear,' replied Margaret.

'Was it ever your room, Aunt Margaret?—when you were a little girl?'

'No, Dorothy. It was my father's room. I used to sit in the old schoolroom, as I do now.'

'Mademoiselle calls it your boudoir,' observed Dorothy.

'Mademoiselle always says pretty things,' said Margaret.

'Mademoiselle is very nice, Aunt Margaret—ever so much nicer than Miss Velvetine.'

'Is she, my pretty?'

'Oh yes—ever so much! The boys used to call her Velvetine. They hated her so.'

'She used to teach me when I was a little girl,' said Margaret.

'Oh, Aunt Margaret, how old she must be! Sixty, I should think.'

'Oh no, my pretty! Nothing like sixty.'

'Well, the boys said she was an awful old duffer,' said Dorothy. 'She was horrid. Oh, Aunt Margaret, here's such a funny thing! It's at the back of this drawer. It looks like a little doll.'

'It was a little doll—a little china doll, roughly clothed in a fragment of print and wrapped in silver paper.' Margaret took it in her hand tenderly, and blinding tears rushed into her eyes. She did not recall to mind having possessed and lost this particular toy. But she remembered the pattern of the print. She had had a frock of that material once. Had she, perchance, dropped this meagre plaything in the garden, or on the stairs, and had her father picked it up and treasured it for her sake?

‘Was it your doll, Aunt Margaret?’ Dorothy was asking. ‘Did you make the frock? Oh, what big stitches!’

‘Yes. It is very badly made,’ said Margaret. ‘But I was a very little girl when I made it—not more than six, I dare say.’

‘It must have been a nice little doll once,’ said Dorothy. ‘Did you like dolls, Aunt Margaret? Oh, what’s this under these papers? Why, it’s a letter for you, Aunt Margaret!’

To Margaret’s astonishment, Dorothy placed in her hands a sealed envelope, directed to herself in her father’s handwriting. It must have lain there for several years. Margaret looked at it dubiously.

‘Aren’t you going to read it?’ asked Dorothy, curiously.

‘Not now, my dear,’ replied Margaret. ‘I must finish my business first.’

And she put the newly-found epistle in her pocket.

In the afternoon she went out alone and walked through the leafless woods to the seat by the lake. The ground was strewn with dull red leaves. A chill moisture seemed to pervade the atmosphere. Not a breath stirred. The mere lay outspread—a sheet of cold grey water. A robin was singing. But his voice was hardly cheerful. It seemed to say that he was solitary and that bright days had fled. Margaret felt that the place was dreary. It seemed to her that it was a fitting spot in which to read a missive from the dead. She sat down, and drew forth her father’s newly-discovered letter. When she had opened it and examined its date, she perceived it had been written shortly before her father’s death. Was it this second letter that her father had intended to specify, as he strove to speak upon his dying bed? The letters had been deposited in two drawers of the same table. Margaret had found the first and had looked no further.

This was the second letter:—

‘MY DAUGHTER MARGARET,—In a recent conversation had with you, I was forced to observe that your mind was less well disciplined and less perfectly attuned to elevated delights than I had desired and hoped to see. I perceived, in short, that your affections were still existent, and, fearing that some adverse circumstance may render them preponderant, I am desirous of releasing you from the promise you

once made me, and which—although the detail was not then expressly stated—involved your embrace of celibacy. Do not imagine that I have changed my mind, and am desirous that you should enter into the married state. Far from it. I still feel, with Bacon, “If he will indeed lead, *vitam vitam*, a life that unites safety and dignity, pleasure and merit; let him embrace the life of study and contemplation!” I have desired you to avoid love, in order that you may avoid suffering. But, should this insidious poison creep unawares into your being—a being less fitted to withstand its advances than I had supposed—it were better to accept it than to refuse it. If you should unhappily love, you must inevitably suffer. But, in this case, I beg you to accept the few grains of pleasure that love can give. Therefore, should you love, marry. But endeavour not to love. Fare thee well.

‘CHARLES JERMINE.’

For some time Margaret sat motionless, with this letter in her hand. She was stunned. She could neither think nor feel. A mist rose up from the mere and folded her in its chill embrace. The robin ceased to sing. Suddenly, there was a sound of a rotten branch, broken asunder. It was as if some great heart had broken. There was a smell of decay all around. Surely spring and the primroses were gone away for ever. Then came the sound of children’s voices.

‘Aunt Margaret, where are you?’ they shouted.

Without an instant’s pause, she arose and fled from them. She ran she knew not whither. Into the woods she dived, hurrying with panting breath, almost sobbing. It seemed as if she were in a great extremity. She pushed through the sodden undergrowth. In the open, she darted from tree to tree. Soon the children’s voices had become faint—had become inaudible. Still she ran on, avoiding the open paths, striving to lose herself. At length, it seemed to her that she was quite alone. Then she threw her arms above her head, and the letter fell to the ground, and in her agony she cried out—

‘Oh, if he had only waited!’

She did not know where she was. But she had long ago crossed the boundaries of Ule, and she stood in the woods of Bartropps. She was close to a frequented path, along

which Henry was at that moment walking. Her cry startled him. He recognised the voice, and, pushing through the tangle-wood, he stood before her.

‘What, what is it?’ he asked.

Something in her air appalled him.

‘Are you ill?—are you suffering?’ he cried, going up to her.

She looked at him without a word.

‘Can I do anything for you?’ he asked.

He spoke coldly. He was angry with her.

‘Have you lost your way?’ he asked again.

Then he saw the letter, stooped, and picked it up, recognising the writing of Jermine, but seeing no word. And he concluded that it was the letter which he had already seen, and he felt more angry still. He considered that Margaret, who had deliberately made a foolish choice, had no right thus to bewail her fate,—thus to intrude herself upon him, on the eve of his wedding, to destroy his peace. Had she not already marred his perfect happiness? He was deeply and continually conscious that Cecily was not his one love, not his ideal, not the entire sweetness of his life, *not Margaret*. Margaret had come in between him and happiness. But for her, he had perchance loved the woman who was to be his wife. But Margaret had foiled him. He had loved her and she had repelled him with scorn, and now, when he was slowly conquering his pain and disappointment and was gathering a small content and joy to his heart, she must needs appear before him, martyred and with her father’s missive in her hand, to remind him that the heaven he had won was but a lower heaven. He could not forgive her. And he hardened his heart against her.

‘What is the matter, Miss Jermine?’ he demanded. ‘Pray speak! You look ill. Tell me what I can do for you. You called out, did you not? You said something, surely? What is it?’

‘Did I speak?’ said Margaret, vaguely.

‘Yes. You called out, and I heard you. Have you lost the children? I thought you said,—If they had only waited!’

‘Did I?’ said she. ‘I don’t know.’

‘You look very tired,’ said he, more kindly, for her wan face touched him. ‘Do you know that you are close to

Bartropps? Come in, and let Mrs. Minimy give you some tea, and I will drive you home, if you will let me.'

'No, no,' said Margaret, shuddering. 'I would rather walk. It is not far. I am sorry. I beg your pardon——'.

Her entire consciousness rushed back upon her. Instinctively, she began to arrange her disordered dress. She drew off her glove to smooth her hair. Henry saw that her hand trembled.

'I wish you would come in,' he said. 'You look so tired.'

'Yes. I have been out a long time, and I have lost my way,' said she. 'But I would rather go home, thank you. Is this the path? Yes,—I know where I am now. Please don't come with me.'

'Indeed I must. I could not let you go home alone. It is almost dark.'

'You are very kind,' she murmured.

'Is this yours?' he asked, giving her the letter.

Then they walked on, side by side, and the letter of the dead man was with them. And Henry thought, resentful and angry, 'I shall never love any woman as I loved her.' And Margaret thought, with passionate regret, 'Oh, if he had but waited,—if he had but waited!' And they were both silent. And the dead leaves rustled mournfully beneath their feet, and a little wind uprose and shook the tree-tops, and the bare branches creaked uneasily, as if there were pain within them.

'It is an eerie walk,' said Henry once.

Then they skirted the lake, passing the spot where Henry had told his tale of love. And he remembered it wrathfully. And she remembered it, with a great sorrow and yearning. And the message from the dead was in her cold hands, and for an instant her heart bounded wildly, and it entered into her soul that she should bid Henry read this second letter from her father.

The next moment she startled him.

'I want a match!' she cried. 'Have you a match? Oh, I pray you, let me have a match!'

'Yes. I have a match,' he said, surprised. 'What do you want a match for?'

'I want to burn something,' she said.

Then she threw the missive upon the ground and bade

him set fire to it. And he bent down and put a lighted match to the dead man's letter, the contents of which he knew not, but which he thought he knew. And the flame caught the paper and enveloped it, and blazed merrily for a minute and then died away, and carried the knowledge of that letter into nothingness.

'Thank you,' said Margaret, sighing. 'Now that is done.'

'Yes. It is quite done,' said he, with a sound of irony in his tone.

For he conceived that this woman was coquetting with him again, and perhaps that she was trying to undo Cecily, and he felt fresh anger, believing that Margaret had caused him to destroy her father's letter of a set purpose, and that haply she meant now to cast its injunctions to the winds. And he hardened his heart yet more against her, and they walked on through the darkness, neither speaking. And again the man thought, 'Though she is mean and cruel, I shall never love any woman as I loved her.' And the woman thought, 'Thank God that I have not done this great wrong. But oh ! if he had but waited—if he had but waited !'

Then they reached the door of Ule, and Margaret held out her hand.

'Thank you,' she said. 'I dare say I shall not see you soon again. I hope that you and Cecily will be very, very happy.'

Then his heart smote him for the hard thoughts he had had of her, and he took her hand and held it for a moment.

'I should like to be friends with you,' he said. 'Will you be friends with us when we come back from Italy?'

'Indeed, indeed I will,' she said, earnestly.

'Thank you. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye. Please give my love to Cecily.'

Then he went, and in a moment the white fog had wrapped him from her sight.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE marriage of Bartropps of Bartropps with Miss St. Roque was celebrated with due honours. Gladestreet erected triumphal arches and hung flags from its windows. The church bells pealed merrily. Little girls scattered flowers. The tenantry dined sumptuously. The children had a fine feast. There was a servants' ball.

A large party assembled at Beaulieu to wish the young couple joy and to eat their wedding-cake. Everybody was present, except Regie Dryad, who was travelling in Greece, and Miss Jermine and Dr. Wheble. Margaret had intended to witness the bridal ceremony. • But at the eleventh hour a natural and justifiable hindrance presented itself, and she thankfully saw Miss Ovid depart alone.

'Where is Miss Jermine?' asked Mrs. Ife of Primulum, at the breakfast.

'Ah, where is Miss Jermine?' echoed Mr. Hathe, who sat on Mrs. Ife's other hand.

'Miss Jermine is kept at home by illness,' explained Primulum. 'Not her own, I'm thankful to say. One of the children has the croup. Wheble has stayed with her. He is on a visit at Ule, and he offered to see to my patient for me. There's not much amiss. But Miss Jermine never leaves nursing to other people.'

'She is so good,' said Mrs. Ife. 'I suppose you have heard of her last scheme?'

'Yes,' replied Primulum. 'One wonders what that sweet creature will do next!'

'But what is it?' asked Miss Velvetine, from Primulum's other side.

'She says she shall go abroad next summer and take all

the flock with her,' said Mrs. Ife. 'My husband is helping her to draw out a route, by which they will see all the principal places of historical interest in Belgium, Holland, Germany, and France. It is not to be any extra expense to the parents. They are to pay at the usual rate. Margaret calls it giving the children a geography lesson. She talks of starting in May and being away for six or eight months. She wants us to go too. Miss Ovid wishes to stay with her uncle.'

'Dear me, how very strange!' said Mr. Hathe, slowly.

'What ridiculous nonsense!' cried Flora, sharply. 'How like Margaret Jermine to have thought of anything so silly! Why, she'll make a regular spectacle of herself! Fancy going about in foreign towns with a heap of children at one's heels! Surely you won't go with her, Mrs. Ife?'

'Indeed, I think we shall,' replied Mrs. Ife. 'My husband likes the idea, and if his book is finished in time, we are sure to go.'

'I'm glad she isn't going till May,' observed Mr. Hathe. 'Those lectures she has begun to give on Political Economy are really wonderful. They are doing good already, and the men look forward to them in the long winter evenings. She lectures uncommonly well. I think we are indebted to your husband for the organisation, Mrs. Ife?'

'He has appointed himself Miss Jermine's secretary,' replied Mrs. Ife. 'So many people wrote and begged her to lecture on their properties that he felt she wanted some one to take the drudgery off her hands. It makes him very busy. He has no time to be dyspeptic now.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Flora, with ill-nature.

'Miss Jermine is a great physician and a great popular influence, because she has perfect sympathy,' said Primulum.

'She is an immense authority, and I honour her,' added Mr. Hathe.

It was, indeed, acknowledged that Miss Jermine of Ule carried great weight in Gladeshire. Imperceptibly, she had become the most influential person in the county. Whether it was on account of her wealth and her independence,—or because of her beauty and her eccentricity,—or because of her love for the little folk, which had won the hearts of young and old,—or because of the solidity of her character, as St. Roque said,—or because of her intense sympathy, as

Primulum averred,—or because of her vast intellectual superiority, as Wheble asserted,—certain it is that people looked upon her as an authority, and even grey-headed men and conceited striplings often withheld their opinions till they had asked,—What does Miss Jermine say? what view does Miss Jermine hold? what is Miss Jermine going to do?

Margaret's school flourished, and she might have multiplied her little charges by the score had she desired to do so. At Christmas, she published the pamphlet on *Boots*, and she was also busy compiling a Manual of Political Economy. Pending its publication, she had commenced giving lectures to the labouring classes, at first among her own tenants, and afterwards, by request, to the tenants of the neighbouring gentry. Ife became her prime minister. Margaret's influence over him was boundless. As his wife said, he had no time to be dyspeptic. Margaret kept him constantly employed, and it was necessary that his head should be clear, and he was careful that it always was clear. At Easter, Margaret gave a series of small dinner-parties, and Ife sat at the foot of her table and talked agreeably. The St. Roques followed suit and asked the Ifes to their house. Other people imitated them. Before the leaves were out Ife was once more in society. Of all her good works, the reformation of Ife was among Margaret's best achievements. Then Margaret completed her arrangements for her geography lesson, and one night, in the middle of May, she and the Ifes crossed to Antwerp with a party of fifteen children, five governesses, three servants, and a courier.

'Why did Margaret suddenly take to giving dinner-parties, my dear?' Mrs. Minimy asked of Miss Ovid. 'It rather surprised me when I received the note, I own. I was very glad and I enjoyed it, and it was quite delightful to see poor Mr. Ife so good and cheerful. But how was it?'

Then Miss Ovid explained that Margaret had lately discovered a letter addressed to her by her father, in which Mr. Jermine had somewhat modified his former instructions, and that therefore Margaret had determined to entertain her neighbours.

'And perhaps she will marry,' suggested Mrs. Minimy. 'Though people always talk of Margaret as if she were a dowager, I don't forget her youth.'

'Oh no, not that,' returned Miss Ovid. 'I don't

think the letter said anything further upon the marriage question.'

So Margaret's secret belonged to herself alone, and, as Mrs. Minimy had said, people regarded Miss Jermine as a dowager and left off wondering if she would marry. And by and by Henry and Cecily came home, and in process of time the church bells pealed forth merrily to announce that a joyful event had taken place at Bartrop's.

'But who is to be congratulated most?' asked Mrs. Primulum, laughing.

The Beaulieu drawing-room was a pleasant place on that cold December afternoon. Mrs. St. Roque was presiding at the tea-tray. Her mother sat near her, bonneted, and with a fur cloak and a muff on a sofa at her back. Flora Velveteine was seated at some distance from the fire, obstinately refusing even to unbutton her tight jacket. Several other ladies were present.

'Oh, we both are!' cried Mrs. St. Roque, delightedly. 'Henry dubbed mamma Grannie on the spot, and I am to be grandmamma. We sha'n't quarrel, shall we, mamma dear?'

'No,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'But, my dear Mrs. Primulum, isn't it nice?'

'Well, I don't think so,' observed Mrs. Hathe. 'Where there's property, it seems to me a pity. An eldest son *is* an eldest son. And I must say I should have been sorry if my eldest son had had his rights overshadowed.'

'But what has happened?' cried Flora. 'Has Cecily got a girl?'

'Haven't you heard?' said Mrs. Primulum. 'Oh, I forgot—you've been away for a week.'

'Cecily has twins, my dear,' said Mrs. Minimy, solemnly. 'Twin boys—born the day before yesterday at noon.'

'Good gracious!' exclaimed Flora. 'What an awful thing!'

'Oh, we don't think it awful at all,' said Mrs. St. Roque. 'We are all delighted, and I believe big Adrian is prouder than he ever was of any of his own children. Oh, it's charming! Twins are so pretty. I don't think there'll be any jealousy or unpleasantness between them, Mrs. Hathe.'

'Dear little pets!' murmured Mrs. Primulum. 'I always wished for twins.'

'So did I,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'Little angels!'

'Pray, are these wonderful twins healthy?' asked Flora. 'I believe one twin almost always dies.'

'Oh, Flora!' exclaimed Mrs. St. Roque.

'They are exceedingly fine babies,' said Mrs. Minimy. 'I examined them thoroughly, and I am confident no infants were ever healthier. As to dear Cecily, she is as well as possible, and such a proud young mother!'

'I think it was so nice of the Bartroppses asking Mrs. Minimy to come to them for this affair,' said Mrs. Homer to Mrs. Ife. 'Of course, it is nice for Mr. Bartropps to have his old friend with him just now. But it was uncommonly sweet of Cecily to arrange it.'

'Cecily Bartropps is a charming woman, and marriage has improved her,' said Mrs. Ife. 'We have seen a good deal of her since we came home.'

'When is Miss Jermine coming back?' inquired Mrs. Homer.

'In a few days,' replied Mrs. Ife. 'Dr. Wheble wants to get back before Christmas, so as to receive the Cleves. Margaret's geography lesson, as she calls it, has been very successful. The children have been intelligent and good, and nothing has gone wrong. Margaret will be pleased with the Bartropps babies, I expect. She is so passionately fond of children, and she and Cecily Bartropps have always been friends.'

Then Mrs. Hathe rose to go, and Flora, with some parade of attention, assisted her to fasten her cloak and to tie on her Shetland veil.

'I feel it to be a sacred duty to behave prettily to dear Mrs. Hathe,' she said, when that lady had left the room.

'Indeed!' said Mrs. Primulum.

'And pray, may we ask why?' inquired Mrs. Homer.

'Well, I hardly know if I ought to say anything yet,' said Flora, simpering. 'But the other day—when I was away—I went to a ball——'

'At the Ingrains? Yes. We were there,' said Mrs. Homer.

'I know. Surely you must have noticed,' proceeded Flora. 'So very marked! Such *excessive* attentions!'

'But who, my dear, who?' questioned Mrs. Homer.

'Didn't you see? Mr. Orlando Hathe,' said Flora.

'Orlando Hathe is engaged to my Clara,' said Mrs. Homer,

coolly. 'He begged and entreated me to let her go to the ball. But I refused. She actually isn't seventeen till Christmas Eve. So then he laid a wager he'd dance with no one under forty, and I believe he kept it. Then he came and proposed the next day. I hardly knew how to consent. Clara is a mere baby. But—Oh, are you going?'

'You are rather too hard,' said Mrs. Ife, reproachfully, when Flora had gone. 'Do you know, it's the one thing that reconciles me to having no children? I shudder to think how you would have ridiculed them.'

'Flora Velvetine shouldn't be an idiot,' said Mrs. Homer. 'No one ever ridiculed a sensible girl yet.'

'But the poor Hathes,' said Mrs. Ife. 'You do say such things to their mother about them. And the Hathes will be your connections soon too!'

'Mothers should be like me,' said Mrs. Homer, complacently. 'They should take the bull by the horns and say everything that is to be said against their children themselves. Then nobody else can say a word. I've always loudly deplored that my girls are vain and frivolous, and now I tell every one it's a pity Gus has turned Roman Catholic and is going to marry a penniless French governess. It's been my plan all my life. It shuts up the gossips completely.'

'Well, when is the wedding to be?' said Mrs. Ife.

Oh, not yet,' returned Mrs. Homer. 'Annie was only married the other day, and we can't afford another breakfast so soon. Old Mr. Hathe is as pleased as Punch. When poor Mrs. Hathe wasn't listening, he told me he was thankful Orlando had chosen a pretty girl. He said he thought the landed gentry ought to marry pretty women, because it was such a burden on the estate, having to provide for a lot of plain spinster daughters. I thought he spoke most feelingly, poor man! I didn't repeat what he said to Mrs. Hathe, of course. I only said to her I was glad her husband seemed to appreciate the advantages of a pretty daughter-in-law, and when she asked what the advantages were, I said I supposed he meant that a pretty woman would be more likely to have good-looking daughters, who would marry. She didn't seem to like it.'

'I dare say not,' said Mrs. Ife, dryly. 'I suppose you know that both Bessie and Harriet are going out to India in

the Zenana Mission. I hope they will do as well as Louie. I hear she is much valued at the hospital.'

'Is it true that Miss Jerminé suggested this Zenana idea?' asked Mrs. Homer.

'Yes. Mr. and Mrs. Hathe agreed at once.'

'Every one agrees to what she wishes,' said Mrs. Homer. 'She is a wonderful woman. I believe my Gus' Adèle is right. She says the good God has canonised her already. I don't believe that, of course. But I will say she is the only woman I ever met who combined goodness and talent *and* beauty.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN Margaret returned to Ule after her long absence, and heard of the birth of Cecily's twin sons, she immediately wrote a little note and despatched it to Bartropps.

'DEAR CECILY AND MR. BARTROPPS,' she wrote, 'I congratulate you much on the arrival of your little sons, in whom I already take the deepest interest, and whom I am most anxious to see. Will you grant me a great favour? May I be godmother to the younger boy, and may his name be *Jermine*?

'Believe me,

'Yours always sincerely,

'MARGARET JERMINE.'

To this short missive Henry sent the following reply :—

'DEAR MISS JERMINE,—My wife and I return you our sincerest thanks for your kind congratulations. It gratifies us both extremely that you should express so much warm interest in our children, and I need hardly say that your wish to be godmother to the younger child shall be granted. Indeed, we are proud that he should be your godson and that he should bear your name.

'My wife begs me to say she hopes you will come and see her and the youngsters as soon as possible. Will you come and have tea with her on Monday? She sends her love to you, and with kind regards from myself,

'I remain,

'Yours very truly,

'HENRY BARTROPPS.'

Cecily was lying on the sofa, clad in a pretty oriental dressing-gown, when Margaret went to see her on the day fixed. She held a baby proudly on each arm. She gave a little scream of joy when Margaret entered.

'Oh, you darling, how nice it is to see you!—how good of you to come!' she exclaimed. 'Look at these pets! Did you ever see anything so jolly? This is your little boy—this fair one. I call him the Wee-er Thing. They are not a bit alike. Wee Thing is like me—as black as a sloe. Your little creature is like Henry. There, have you got him safe? Oh, nurse, do take Wee Thing! I just took them both when I heard you coming, Margaret, because I thought you'd like to see the family group. Take the young gentlemen away, now, please, nurse!'

'No, no,' said Margaret, pressing the infant in her arms closer to her. 'Let me keep him a little. I love babies.'

So the nurse retired with the elder twin, and Margaret fondled the younger and kissed and caressed him to her heart's content. Motherliness was an inherent part of her nature, and she knew instinctively how to handle an infant, as she knew instinctively how to deal with the tempers and the weaknesses of older children. But this babe aroused strange feelings in her breast. For an instant, a great bitterness overpowered her, and she thought that she could strangle that little life and kill it. Then an inexpressible and yearning tenderness filled her soul and she raised the infant's face to hers and kissed it passionately. The little one was disturbed and began to wail. Margaret soothed him with infinite gentleness, and in a moment his cry was hushed. Cecily watched her, amused.

'I believe you know a great deal more about children than I do,' she observed. 'I love these urchins awfully, of course. But I really don't know much about them. You must bring them up for me, Margaret.'

'Willingly, dear,' said Margaret, softly stroking the baby's tiny hand.

'It was so nice of you asking to be Wee-er Thing's god-mother,' Cecily went on. 'Henry was awfully pleased. Jermine Bartropps will sound very well. Wee Thing is to be called Henry, of course—Henry St. Roque. I rather wish he'd been the fair one. But it can't be helped. They'll make a pretty contrast, won't they? I'm so glad they aren't

alike. I was horrified when they told me. I thought it was a case of T'other and Which, and I don't wish my sons to have nicknames. Won't it be jolly to see them playing together as they get older? I mean each of them to have a pony, and I shall dress them in sailor-suits. Won't they look delicious?'

'I think they will look sweet,' said Margaret. 'What do you think about it, my king?' she went on, apostrophising the infant. 'My pretty darling, you shall be as happy as Aunt Margaret can make you!'

Then the tea-tray was brought in, and the nurse came to fetch the baby. Margaret parted with him reluctantly.

'I must see him again, nurse, and his brother,' she said.

Then she put the white shawl over his head and relinquished him.

'Now we can be comfortable,' said Cecily. 'The dear boys are delightful creatures, of course. But I don't understand baby language, as you do, my dear. In fact, I'm sure I shall get on better with them when they're big, and I can teach them manly things. I want them to be exactly like Henry—strong and healthy, and able to do everything and no nonsense about them. You've no idea, Margaret, what a perfect man Henry is. Nobody but his wife could know. Oh, we've had such a happy year! No one can imagine how happy I have been,' the young wife rambled on, almost forgetting the presence of her guest. 'I always thought I should be awfully happy when I married Henry. But I'd no idea *how* happy I should be. It's simply perfect. Henry isn't demonstrative. But he's always kind and nice. And I feel I belong to him. Even if I don't see him for hours, I feel he is mine—my own husband. And that's the nicest feeling a woman can have. Now, you see, he's going to stand for South Gladeshire. They say poor old Lord Bolton *can't* get through this last attack. We shall be as busy as bees directly. There may be an election at any time.'

'I only got home on Thursday,' said Margaret. 'All this is news to me.'

'Oh, there's plenty of news in the county,' said Cecily. 'Gus Homer has become a Catholic. But of course you know that. Then the eldest Hathe—Orlando—the big, red-faced, good-natured fellow, is engaged to Clara Homer. And two of the Hathe girls are going out to India as

Zenana ladies. They say it was your doing. I'm sure they bless you. The poor things had nothing to do at home. Then the Starts have a little girl, and so have the Cleves. Isabee *will* be jealous of me. She'd have liked a boy, I know.'

'Isabee's baby is quite an old baby,' observed Margaret. 'She was born before Miss Ovid and Dr. Wheble joined me.'

'Yes, I know. I only mentioned it *en passant*. There's no other news, I think,—except that the Ifes are going to give a dance, and Mr. Ife is considered quite a county magnate now. That reminds me you are getting quite too notable, my dear. I hear you are looked upon as the principal person in Gladeshire now. They say some of the old buffers don't like it. It riles them for Jermine of Ule to be a woman.'

'I didn't know,' said Margaret. 'I'm sure I'm very sorry.'

'Why should you be? Papa respects you above worlds. He says your lectures last winter did more to put the agricultural labourer on a proper political footing than any amount of speeches he and Henry might make. Henry thinks the same. He says you've won the county to Conservatism. And that's high praise from him. Because you know, he doesn't really approve of ladies lecturing.'

'I didn't speak in the Conservative interest,' said Margaret. 'I abjure parties. I only explained the real meaning of things and their consequences. I tried to show the men what was *right*, without ever naming Liberalism or Conservatism.'

'Well, all you say only proves the truth of Conservative principles,' cried Cecily, delightedly. 'You tell the people what is right and they become Conservatives. Doesn't that prove that Conservative principles are the right principles?'

'Perhaps,—if you accept my views as dogmas,' said Margaret, smiling. 'But I am far from considering myself infallible. All I try to do is to give people some means of forming independent judgments, and of adapting themselves to new historical necessities. You know Herbert Spencer's definition of life,—that it is *the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations*. Well, one can hardly

expect untrained capacities to adjust their minds to new things without assistance.'

'What a queer girl you are, my dear!' remarked Cecily, after a moment's pause. 'One minute you are hugging a baby as if nurseries and powder-puffs were all you cared about, and the next you are quoting Herbert Spencer and lecturing on Political Economy. You are an anomaly. Why are you so unusual and so different to other people?'

'I don't know,' said Margaret.

'You grant you are rather odd?'

'Well, I suppose I must, since every one tells me so.'

'And you don't mind?'

'No.'

'And are your lectures really without political bias?'

'I hope so. I wish people to think for themselves. But, before they can do that, they must know the *rationale* of things. It seems to me absurd to give a vote to a man who doesn't know the history of his own country, who hasn't knowledge enough even to guess the possible outcome of important acts of legislation, and who—from his position in the world—is inclined to take only one-sided views. My lectures are not only on Political Economy. They embrace various other subjects.'

'They are very useful, Margaret.'

'I shall be glad, if they prove so. This winter I mean to alternate the lectures with pianoforte recitals. The women don't come to the lectures, and it is hard that the men should have all the intellectual treats and the women none.'

'Well done, Margaret! I'm awfully glad you befriended the mothers. I sympathise with the mothers very much now I'm one myself. Fancy having twins in a cottage! I'm sure, I should have left mine squalling. I shouldn't have had the energy to get up and wash and dress them myself. No! I'll never call a poor woman dirty and slatternly again.'

Margaret smiled. She had not waited to be the mother of twins ere she sympathised with cottagers' wives. But she did not say so.

'Margaret, why did you go abroad?' asked Cecily, next. 'My hair stood on end when I heard of it. Fancy dragging a caravan of children all over Europe! I sha'n't ever take the twins.'

'I'll take them,' volunteered Margaret.

'Thank you, dear. But why did you take this lot? It's the oddest thing you've ever done.'

'Well, I wanted to teach them geography,' explained Margaret. 'Geography is so dull theoretically, and so delightful practically. My children were all so intelligent that I feel fully rewarded. We all studied geography, history, geology, botany, and art, in an absolutely practical way.'

'You extraordinary girl!' said Cecily. 'I never could go trotting off with half a hundred kids behind me. Will you really take the twins abroad some day?'

'Certainly.'

'Then I feel that's off my hands. You see, we sha'n't get away from England much in the future. Henry means to stick to politics, and by and by, of course he will be a Cabinet Minister, and ultimately—but this is quite between ourselves, Margaret!—he must be Prime Minister. I've set my heart on that. I'm determined he shall lead his party. Oh, the glory when some day the Queen sends for Mr. Bartropps!—for my Henry!'

'I hope your ambition will be realised, dear,' said Margaret.

'It will be,' said Cecily, confidently. 'Papa thinks very highly of Henry already. You see, he is not conceited, like so many young men, and he is clever and steady. Yes, I'm quite sure he will be an eminent man. He's always done well everywhere, and why should he fail in politics? I shouldn't have liked to marry a common, unambitious man. I must attach myself to some one who holds the first place. That was poor Regie's failing. He wasn't in the first rank. He is now. Have you read his new poem?'

'Yes. He was so good as to give it to me.'

'Well, it's very fine, isn't it? Every one says so. But they don't know it was my doing. Do you know the poor dear fellow proposed to me last year the day before Henry did, and he was quite grand over it! I admired him awfully. He said the most terribly fine things. Then he went to Greece and wrote this last poem, and just bounded to the top of the tree. All through me, my dear! If I'd accepted him, he'd have been happy and missed fame. But I refused him, and there he is—celebrated! He's a great poet now, and I did it!'

'I saw him at Paris the other day,' said Margaret. 'We met by accident at the Petit Trianon, and then he came to see us several times and went with us to two or three places. He was very kind to the children and didn't seem to mind going about with them. Dr. Wheble wouldn't do that, and he laughed at Mr. Dryad and told him he always stayed at a different hotel and travelled by a different train. But Mr. Dryad was like Mr. Ife. He didn't care.'

'Oh!' observed Cecily, in a tone of some significance.

'Perhaps Mr. Dryad is coming home soon,' continued Margaret. 'Old Mr. Dryad wants him to come and live at Outwoods, and he says, as his uncle is nearly ninety, he must comply with his wishes.'

'Oh!' said Cecily again.

Then the nurse brought in the babies for a few moments and Margaret forgot everything else.

'I mustn't neglect Wee Thing for Wee-cr Thing,' she said.

And she took both the infants in her arms, to the astonishment and delight of the nurse, who afterwards told the lady's-maid that she had never seen any young lady so handy with a baby as Miss Jermine, and she did hope Miss Jermine would marry and have a family of her own.

'It is so good of you to let me be that dear little fellow's godmother,' Margaret said, when the nurse had withdrawn. 'I feel as if a great brightness had come into my life.'

'I don't think it's very good of us,' said Cecily. 'The poor little scrap will want friends. It's the only bad thing about twins. They're equal and not equal. They'll be the same age, and yet one will be the heir of Bartropps and the other will only be a younger son. I wish the other shrimp had been a girl. Nature made a mistake. I oughtn't to have had twin sons, as they can't both be Bartropps of Bartropps.'

'It won't make so much difference in this case, because Jermine will be my heir,' said Margaret.

'What?' exclaimed Cecily, sitting upright and letting her teaspoon fall.

Margaret picked it up.

'I intend to make Jermine my heir,' she said. 'I must

have an heir, you know, and who can be better than the son of my two oldest friends?’

She spoke slowly and with an effort, and her colour had risen. But she was sitting with her back to the light and Cecily did not remark her emotion.

‘But, my dear Margaret, we couldn’t allow such a thing,’ the young mother said. ‘Henry won’t hear of it, I’m sure.’

‘But you can’t help it,’ said Margaret. ‘You can’t prevent my making whatever will I please; and I tell you, I intend my dear little godson to be my heir. I’ve always meant that your second son should be my heir. You and I and Mr. Bartropp were playfellows when we were children, and when you two married, I made up my mind about this. You can’t prevent me, dear Cecily.’

‘Are you mad, Margaret?’ gasped Cecily.

‘No. But somebody must inherit Ule. It is unreservedly mine. There is no entail.’

‘But, my dear, why shouldn’t you marry some day, and have children of your own? You must, you must!’ cried Cecily, excitedly.

‘No. I shall never marry,’ said Margaret.

‘Never? Oh, my dear Margaret, when we heard you had begun giving dinner-parties, we quite hoped you were changing your mind.’

‘No, Cecily. I have resolved not to seclude myself so much. But I shall never marry. I have not changed my mind upon that point.’

‘What a pity!’ sighed Cecily.

‘So I am determined to make your boy my heir,’ continued Margaret. ‘He will inherit Ule, as if he were my own son.’

‘You quite overpower me,’ said Cecily. ‘I haven’t words to speak. We never thought of such a thing. We never dreamed of it.’

‘No, dear. Of course you didn’t,’ said Margaret. ‘But don’t look so solemn, Cecily. I must leave my property to some one.’

‘Well, nothing need be settled,’ said Cecily. ‘Of course, you can change your mind any day. But really you’ve taken away my breath. I sha’n’t know how to tell Henry, and I can’t think what he’ll say.’

But when Henry heard of Margaret's intention to adopt one of his sons, he said nothing for several minutes, and Cecily poured out her news without response.

'Why don't you speak, darling? Why don't you say something?' she cried at last.

'I don't know what to say,' said Henry, slowly. 'We can't allow it, my dear. The thing is impossible.'

'That's what I said,' returned Cecily. 'I told her you'd never consent to it, and she said no one could prevent her doing what she chose with her own property.'

'Well, I must remonstrate with her,' said Henry. 'I really can't agree to such a thing. It's preposterous. It's subverting all the laws of landed property. She mustn't do it.* I never dreamed of such a thing when she wrote and asked to be godmother. I must see her as soon as possible.'

He called upon Margaret several times, however, before he found her at home. When at last he was admitted, he found her sitting with Miss Ovid.

'I have come to expostulate with you very seriously,' he began, immediately. 'You will excuse my coming to the point rather bluntly. My wife tells me you propose adopting our younger boy. I could not hear of such a thing.'

'I shall be sorry if I may have nothing to do with my heir,' said Margaret, with gentle dignity. 'I should like to make a marked difference between your boy and other young people, Mr. Bartropps, and it will disappoint me if you will not allow me to do this. Of course, I must submit to you so far. But, as I told Cecily, no one can interfere with my disposition of my property. Jermine Bartropps is my heir already.'

'Good heavens! what are you thinking of?' exclaimed Henry.

'Oh please don't deny me!' cried Margaret. 'Let me treat the child as my heir! It is the only thing I have ever asked of you. Dr. Wheble and Miss Ovid know, and they do not remonstrate.'

Henry looked at Miss Ovid.

'Margaret has a right to do as she likes,' said that lady.

'But surely you don't approve of her doing this?' said

Henry, irascibly. 'It is monstrous. What will people say?'

Margaret blushed.

'They say so many things that I have left off caring,' said she. '*Let it be as I wish!*'

'But, my dear Miss Jermine, Ule has been in the hands of the Jermines for generations,' protested Henry. 'You positively have no right to leave it to another family.'

'I have, indeed. The entail was cut off by my grandfather. I shall leave something to the people. But the bulk of my property will be inherited by my godson, Jermine Bartropps.'

'But have you no relations, Miss Jermine? Have you no cousins?'

'No. My father was the only son of an only son. I am the only Jermine living.'

'And is the name of Jermine to die with you?'

'Yes. Unless, some day, Mr. Jermine Bartropps chooses to become Mr. Jermine. That will be his affair. I shall never ask him to give up his patronymic. Don't let us talk any more about it.'

Henry went home and into his wife's presence, very cross.

'Well, what have you done, darling?' Cecily asked him. 'You don't look pleased. Has Margaret been tiresome?'

'She insists on giving your boy a present of about £300,000,' he said. 'It is most annoying. Thank Heaven, she says she is going to leave part of her property to the people,—whatever that may mean. But I fear that doesn't embrace any large sum. She particularly said she should leave the *bulk* of her property to the child. I am extremely put out. It's always the way with women,' he muttered to himself. 'If they take a Quixotic, sentimental idea into their heads, they drive it, if they have to go through a stone wall. It's a confounded bore.' Cecily heard. But she made no comment. She was clever and tactful.

'I dare say this will never happen,' she remarked presently.

'What won't happen? What are you talking about?' he asked, snappishly.

'Why, about Margaret and Wee-er Thing. You see, she's quite young still. I dare say she'll marry.'

'Not a bit of it!' contradicted Henry, with a jealous feeling at his heart.

'Oh, she may,' said Cecily. 'In fact, I have a notion she will. And I guess whom!'

'Who?' inquired Henry, with the jealous feeling irritating his whole personality.

'Why, Regie! Didn't I tell you of their meeting at Paris, and of his giving her his book, and going about with her cartload of children? I consider his behaviour expressed devotion.'

'Nonsense, my dear! Regie is still in love with you.'

'Oh dear no, Henry. Not now. Men are never constant.'

Henry could not deny this assertion, and he said nothing. But he chafed beneath it, and the jealousy within him madened him, and he felt that he could strangle any man who should persuade Margaret to be his wife. Then he remembered that he was Cecily's husband, and he sighed heavily.

'Constancy isn't a virtue in my eyes,' Cecily went on. 'In fact, I think it's rubbish. What in the world is the good of being constant to a person who doesn't care for you? It isn't constancy at all. It's imbecility. No, my darling,' she concluded, getting up and throwing her arms round her husband's neck, 'I *abhor* constancy. If you had been constant to a phantom—to a girl who didn't care for you—oh, my dearest, what would have become of me?'

'Pooh, my dear, you'd have married Regie,' said Henry, releasing himself.

'*Henry!*' cried Cecily. 'How can you say such a thing!'

'My dear child, I was only joking,' said he.

'I don't like that sort of joke,' she said. 'Don't do it again please. It makes me feel as if—as if—'

'As if your heart were too big for your body?' suggested he. 'My dear, how often have I told you you love me too much!'

Then he kissed her and went away, saying that he had a letter to write. But he did not take up his pen. The fire in his study was low, and he sat miserably before it, watching the dying embers and wondering why he or Margaret or Cecily had ever been born, and sometimes vituperating the

two women and sometimes cursing himself. Suddenly, a little flame sprang up, and danced merrily for a moment. Then, as suddenly, it sank. The hearth was dark. The fire had gone completely out.

‘We shall all be dead some day,’ groaned Henry.

Then he rang the bell, somewhat roughly.

‘Why have you let the fire out?’ he said. ‘Bring me a lamp!’

CHAPTER XXVII.

Nor many months later, Parliament was dissolved, and every one was agog with the new elections. No one spoke upon any theme but politics. There were public meetings everywhere. People went about wearing colours. Placards were to be seen in every direction, bidding the voters poll for Such-and-Such an one. Ladies canvassed, smiling. Perhaps they bribed. Who knows? Gentlemen canvassed, and waxed eloquent. The voters were bewildered. They scratched their heads and tried to think, and the more they thought the more puzzled they became.

Johnnie St. Roque flew hither and thither, and worked, he declared, like a horse. One day, he drew Clout, the cowman, aside, and put the whole political situation before him. And the next day he overheard Clout telling an under-gardener that 'Muster John said as how all Muster Beaconsfield did were wrong and all Muster Gladstone did were right, and so it must be so, as Muster John he said so.' Whereupon, Johnnie tore his hair and gave up politics for two days. After which, Cecily rallied him, and he recommenced his labours harder than before.

In these days, Cecily drove about a great deal, beautifully dressed, smiling, gracious, bowing right and left, and constantly accompanied by the twins and their nurses. Whenever she appeared in public with the babies, she was greeted with uproarious cheers.

'My dear Mrs. Bartropps, your twin sons will carry the election,' one of Henry's enthusiastic supporters told her.

Indeed, had Bartropps of Bartropps been a candidate for a crown, his infant children could not have made him more popular. The agricultural labourer is the master of England,

and he decides the fate of this great empire after a fashion of his own. To Hodge, there was something supremely human in being the father of twins, and the young mother with her babies appealed strongly to his homely understanding. He knew nothing of the rival merits of Muster Beaconsfield and Muster Gladstone. But he felt there must be goodness and dependableness in a young man who had a lovely wife and who was the father of twin sons. To a man, the electors of South Gladeshire promised their votes to Bartropp's of Bartropp's. Henry began to feel that his foot was on the ladder that led to distinction. If he had failed in love, he might bid for fame.

'Pooh, you little goose!' he would say to Cecily, when she gave vent to glowing prophecies. 'Perhaps—a great many years hence—I shall be an Under-Secretary. You mustn't expect more.'

But in his heart he was as ambitious as his wife.

'If I get in—!' he would say.

But this was said for the pleasure of meeting Cecily's instant contradiction. Cecily was very demonstrative and she kissed her husband often. But he suffered her kisses with a good grace now, and endured them as he had not been able to endure them in earlier days. Did not his wife minister to his *amour-propre* and stimulate his ambition?

Henry conducted his campaign with unwearied ardour. He was a zealous party man. Ignorant people came away from the meetings at which he spoke believing that Liberal and Asinine were synonymous terms. He pursued a line of objurgation, of contempt, of ridicule. He picked holes in the programme of his opponent oftener than he announced his own views. Now and then he used opprobrious terms. Always he denounced the policy of his adversaries as unfailingly tortuous, and belauded the entire rectitude of his own side. His father-in-law took him to task for his acrimonious party-spirit. But Henry laughed and said that Party was a necessity and men must bow to it, and St. Roque let him be.

'He is young,' he told his wife. 'Time will quench his intemperance.'

Margaret canvassed for no one. But she convened a meeting of her tenantry, and followed Johnnie St. Roque's example, with the difference that she put the political

situation before her audience so clearly that the electors left the meeting thoughtful, and determined to weigh the subject yet again, and to vote conscientiously and with pure motives.

For Margaret had reminded them that they were men and not puppets. She had bidden them not to be carried away by any party cry. She had begged them to remember that the government of a country must subserve to the general well-being—not to the good of one class, but to the good of all classes—not for domestic good alone, but for the good of the world at large. She had said she herself belonged to no party. She carried no badge. She wore no colours. She disliked party-spirit. She believed that it led to great evils. Not seldom it made men unprincipled. They sometimes stuck to their party because it was their party, although they disapproved in their hearts of what their party was doing. But each elector had an individuality of his own and he ought to satisfy his individuality. He was responsible for his vote to the great country to which he belonged. Every conscientious voter swelled the number of honest Englishmen. Every unconscientious voter magnified the array of English rogues. It was cheating the country to give an unconscientious vote. Then she had told them briefly what, in her opinion, the country wanted both at home and abroad, and she had given lucid and logical reasons for the opinions she held.

By this time, Margaret was used to speaking to an audience. But she had never before spoken to an audience so closely-packed and so enthusiastic. Her lectures on Political Economy had been well attended and attentively listened to. But an occasional clapping of hands had been all the signs of applause she had received at these unexciting entertainments, and she was unprepared for the tumultuous cheers, the loud cries, the stamping of feet and the waving of hands, which greeted her first public political utterances. At the first outburst of excitement, the colour flew to her cheek and her eye kindled. She was not nervous. The applause exhilarated her, and she spoke fervently. It was not until her speech was just over that she descried the Conservative candidate for South Gladeshire standing in the crowd by the door.

‘I would not degrade myself or you by advising you how to vote,’ she concluded. ‘Think for yourselves and vote

for the gentleman who will be most likely to do what you would do, if you yourselves were members of Parliament.'

Then the audience shouted and clapped deafeningly, and suddenly, some one bawled out, 'Bartropps! Bartropps!' And they shouted again, till Henry was forced to stand upon a bench and bow. But he would not speak. It was not his meeting. Then some one else cried, 'Order!'—and Margaret descended from the platform and vanished through a side-door, where one of her servants was waiting with a lantern to escort her home. Henry, however, joined her immediately and accompanied her, without asking for permission, while the man with the lantern walked on a few paces in front.

'You must be tired,' said Henry. 'Public speaking is very exciting and very exhausting.'

There was a tinge of satire in his tone and Margaret perceived it.

'I dare say you don't approve of my doings,' she said.

'I did not say so,' returned he.

'Nay. But your manner implied disapproval.'

'I am sorry for that.'

'Why should you be sorry? Many people disapprove. Even Dr. Wheble and Mr. Ife tried to dissuade me from holding this meeting. They thought it would attract some rough folk. But I considered it my duty to speak out. I consider that a landowner is a sort of parent to the children of the soil, and in all cases, a parent's duty is to guide his children. I felt that I should be omitting a great duty if I failed to speak just now. There can hardly be a greater crisis than a general election. But I shall not speak again.'

There was a short silence. It had been raining during the day and the road was full of muddy puddles. But the lamp-light irradiated these dirty pools and they looked momentarily like sheets of burnished gold. The hedges seemed to grow as the lantern travelled on,—to appear, to become distinct, to vanish. The sky was overspread with clouds. Not a single star was visible. A slight wind was stirring, damp, and refreshing after the hot atmosphere of the gas-lit and crowded room in which Margaret had been haranguing.

'I liked your speech,' said Henry, abruptly.

‘Did you really?’ she returned, in a surprised tone.

‘I did. Of course, I would rather somebody else had made it—some man, I mean. But I won’t be ungenerous. In itself, the speech was admirable. Indeed, it made me ashamed of myself. It made me wish I were less a party man. It was a very high-minded speech. It touched me, and yet I don’t feel as if I could go with you practically. High-mindedness seldom carries an election, and I own it is the wish of my heart to be returned.’

‘You will be,’ said Margaret. ‘I hear that Mr. Smith has no chance.’

‘So my friends tell me. But one cannot tell what the poll will bring forth.’

‘Why are you not hopeful?’ she asked.

‘I cannot tell. Sometimes I feel very hopeful. To night I am depressed. I came to hear you—I was there all the time—and you depressed me. Since we were children and I used to bully you, you seem to have become exalted, while I remain commonplace.’

‘Oh no, no!’

‘Yes. It is so. I am ambitious. I hope I love my country. But I own I covet distinction. I don’t say this to every one. But your single-hearted speech has stirred me and I feel small. To-night, I feel as if I should never make a political speech again. Yet to-morrow I am engaged to attend a meeting, and I know my ambition will conquer, and I shall make a thoroughly party speech. That’s why you make me ashamed—because your integrity is so unflinching, and with me, the lower nature predominates.’

‘Ambition to serve his country cannot spring from a man’s lower nature,’ said Margaret.

‘No. Not if his ambition *is* to serve his country.’

‘Yours is,’ she said.

‘I fear not. At least, not entirely. My ambition is vastly personal.’

‘Make it patriotic.’

‘If I could!’

‘You can, if you will.’

‘Stand aloof from my party, I suppose you mean.’

‘I mean, speak always and vote always from your conscience. As I said just now to my tenants, I would not offer you advice.’

‘But independent members never rise very high.’

‘They rise to the loftiest heights of morality. I think they are moral giants,’ said Margaret.

‘But a man who is untrue to his party isolates himself, and isolation effects nothing.’

‘But probably the party is often right,’ said Margaret. ‘All I meant was, that a man who is true to his conscience does not adhere to his party *because* it is his party, but because it is pursuing a right policy.’

‘It is a fine doctrine,’ said Henry, sighing.

He did not tell his wife of this conversation. But the next day he made a forcible speech, in which he deviated considerably from his former line of action, saying that although he was a Conservative and meant with all his heart and soul to serve the Conservative interests, he meant to serve his conscience even more, and that he would only be a Conservative inasmuch as Conservative principles promoted the true interests of the country and of the people.

The papers said it was a manly and an independent speech, and St. Roque complimented his son-in-law, and Margaret read the speech with a swelling breast. But no one divined that the last effort of Miss Jermine of Ule had been to modify the policy of Bartropps of Bartropps and to raise its tone. Least of all did Cecily imagine that her husband’s departure was ascribable to Margaret. Was it likely, indeed, that Henry would have culled a lesson from the speech of a woman?

The General Election took place when spring had come and the land was fair with primroses. To half England it brought disappointment and grief. To the other half it gave triumph and elation. The political pendulum had swung back, and few recognised that so it had to be, and that it was neither failure for the one party nor glory for the other. It was simply reaction.

Henry Bartropps was returned for South Gladeshire with a large majority.

‘Oh, my king, my king!’ cried Cecily, the moment she was alone with her husband, kissing him rapturously.

‘You silly child!’ said he, smiling. ‘Why, what should you do, if I were ever invited into a Cabinet?’

‘Why, what shall I do when you are implored to *form* a Cabinet, dearest?’ cried Cecily.

‘You mustn’t talk nonsense, my dear,’ returned he. ‘People will think us both fools.’

But he was not ill-pleased. Like other men, he appreciated flattery, and, after all, what flattery is so sweet as the flattery of a wife? No man, it is said, is a hero to his own valet. But if he be a hero to the wife of his bosom, has he not achieved a great thing? He must indeed have parts who seems wise to the person who sees him as often in undress as in full uniform, who hears him give orders to the grooms and gardeners as well as make speeches to his constituents, who knows him, in short, not only when he must be great, but when he might be little.

Henry felt indulgent towards the wife who fed his ambition, and he was more lover-like to the mother of his twin sons than he had been to his pretty *fiancée* in the days when he had been veritably a lover. But still, at times, the image of Margaret,---sometimes as when he had wooed her, troubled, weeping,---sometimes as when she had preached political integrity to him, dignified, gentle, womanly,---came between him and Cecily, and at these moments he would put his wife aside and depart, pleading business, angry in his heart, humiliated, struggling, asking himself wildly,---Would it never cease---this hankering after that which might not be?---should he never think of Margaret, tranquil-hearted?---must he deceive his wife for ever? And his soul was often sick. But no man nor woman knew.

Then the day was fixed for the new Parliament to assemble, and on the day before Henry and Cecily were to repair to town, Margaret walked through the woods to Bartropps to take leave of her little godson and his brother and their mother.

‘How much I shall miss the babies!’ she said. ‘You must bring them back soon, Cecily.’

‘My dear, if they ail in the smallest, I shall send them to you,’ announced Cecily. ‘London may not agree with them, and if I see them looking weedy, I shall pack them off to you without a moment’s delay. I shall just telegraph, and you must find room for them somewhere.’

‘My dear Cecily, would you really trust me?’ asked Margaret.

'Trust you !' cried the mother. 'Of course I would. I believe you love them nearly as well as I do, and I'm absolutely certain you know ten times more about infants than I ever shall. You're sure you'll have them?'

'Most gladly.'

'Thanks. That's a weight off my mind. I couldn't see my children pining away before my eyes, and I couldn't send them back here by themselves, and I couldn't leave Henry. Margaret, you are a godsend.'

'Only a god-mother,' said Margaret, smiling.

Then she rose to go, and Cecily walked through the garden with her, and when Margaret had passed through the gate into the wood, Cecily detained her, still talking, and with the sunlight playing upon her dark silky hair, and her bright face, and her pretty dress, and the red flowers in her bosom.

'I shouldn't wonder if you met Henry,' she said. 'He talked of riding through the wood to the old saw-pits. We are having some trees cut down just there. He'll come along the bridle-path.'

'Perhaps I shall,' said Margaret, walking swiftly away.

And she hoped that she should not meet Henry. For though she had schooled herself to an outward tranquillity, there was often a great passion in her heart and an undying regret, and a cruel despair and bitterness; and at these times, ere she had struggled—with pain and humiliation—against her longing and overcome it, she would ask herself with tears,—Would it be always thus?—could peace never be hers?—must her grief be eternal, and her weakness infinite? And often her soul was sick. But no man nor woman knew.

When Margaret reached the old saw-pit, it was already late. The sun was getting low, and his level beams dazzled her. He seemed to be standing at the end of the bridle-path, and it seemed to her as if he were peering at her curiously. He was like a great undeceivable eye gazing at her, and she was glad that her way did not lie along that westward glade. For he seemed to pierce her through and through, and she could not bear so acute a scrutiny. It is not only the guilty, the impure, the treacherous, who would fain hide their hearts from sight.

She turned to pursue the path which led to the mere. As

she did so a sound attracted her attention. It was the sound as of the champing of a bit. She looked in the direction whence it came and saw a saddle-horse, with the bridle hanging loose upon its neck, grazing at will. In an instant, she perceived that it was Henry's favourite mare. Where was her master?

He was not far off. He was lying at the bottom of the old saw-pit which had been long disused, and was now choked with rubbish and overgrown with weeds. He had dismounted and had stepped into it unawares. In an instant, the strong young man had been rendered helpless. He had not been able to save himself. He had caught frantically at something, —at anything. But there was nothing to seize hold of but young bracken and straggling brambles and coarse grass, and he had fallen heavily to the bottom. And at the bottom lay stones and broken pottery and part of an old and jagged saw, with its teeth turned upwards.

For a time he had lain there unconscious. When he came to himself again, Margaret was by his side. How she found him she never knew. But some instinct led her to the spot and then the torn brushwood told the story and she slipped down the bank. There she found Henry, senseless, bleeding, his white face upturned, one arm doubled beneath him, his legs twisted.

'Henry! Henry!' she cried, wildly, kneeling beside him.

Then he opened his eyes and looked at her, without recognising her.

'Are you hurt?' she asked him. 'What has happened? Speak to me, for Heaven's sake!'

'I—have had—a fall,' he said, slowly, and with difficulty.

'You are dreadfully hurt,' said she.

'Yes—I am—killed,' he gasped.

'No, no. Let me run and call some one!'

'No—it's—of no use—Don't go—I've—broken—my back. Something is running into—my lungs——'

Then a great pallor came over him and his eyelids fell. He had swooned away. Margaret wrung her hands. Then she stood up in that narrow, grave-like place and hallooed with all her strength. Again she raised her voice, and again. At last, from some remote spot she could faintly detect an answering shout and she called back again.

Then she knelt down once more and called Henry by his

name. He opened his eyes and this time he recognised her.

‘Peggy,’ he said, faintly smiling.

‘Yes,’ she replied.

‘Did I fall into the mere?’ he asked, gasping.

‘No. You have fallen into the old saw-pit. Are you in pain?’

‘Yes. I think I’m dreadfully hurt. I think I am killed.’

‘No, no.’

‘Yes. I think so. Raise my head, Peggy. Could you, dear?’

A thrill of joy ran through her as she obeyed him.

‘Is that nicer?’ she asked him, in the coaxing tone that she would have employed to one of her children who was sick.

‘Yes, thank you. I’m sorry I bullied you so, Peggy.’

‘Never mind. That doesn’t matter now.’

‘I don’t know how I fell, Peggy. Don’t let Mrs. Minimy be frightened when they take me home.’

‘No.’

For a moment Margaret had forgotten the great need for help. Now she recollected, and, still kneeling and supporting the injured man, she lifted up her voice and called again. And again, in the distance, but a little nearer, she heard a faint response.

‘Some one is coming,’ she said.

‘Yes. Peggy dear, I can’t remember. What is it?’

‘What is what, Henry?’

‘Something has happened, hasn’t it?’

‘I don’t know what you mean, Henry.’

‘What have I done? It seems to me—Oh, Peggy, tell me, do tell me!’

‘Don’t you remember you stood for Parliament the other day? You are the member for South Gladeshire. And don’t you remember Cecily and the twins——’

‘Cecily and the twins!’ he repeated.

‘Cecily your wife and your twin sons.’

He groaned.

‘I remember,’ he said. ‘Peggy, I am killed.’

He closed his eyes again, and again Margaret shouted, and once more the answer came, yet nearer.

‘They are coming,’ she said.

But Henry did not reply, and she shouted again and yet again. Would they never come? Must Henry die here?

‘Peggy!’ he said, suddenly.

‘Yes, Henry.’

‘I remember now. It was you I loved, Peggy.’

‘Hush, hush!’ said Margaret.

‘It was you I loved,’ he reiterated. ‘Did you love me?’

She did not reply. In truth, she could not. Her heart was bursting. But it was Cecily’s husband whose head was pillowed in her arms.

‘Why did you burn that letter?’ he asked.

‘Never mind,’ she said, soothingly. ‘It doesn’t matter now.’

‘But why did you? Was it the letter you gave me to read?’

‘No. Another.’

‘Saying the same thing?’

‘No.’

‘Cancelling that thing?’

‘Oh, Henry, don’t ask!’

‘Yes, yes. I am dying, I tell you. Did it cancel that other?’

‘Yes.’

‘Oh, my God!—and I married Cecily!’

‘Hush! Henry, hush!’

His breath came quick and hard, almost sobbing.

‘Peggy, Peggy, my love, my darling, do you love me?’

‘Oh, hush, hush!’ she said, weeping.

‘I cannot. Tell me, Peggy! Tell me quick. I am dying.’

‘Hush, hush!’ she said again, with grievous tears.

‘Peggy, I am dying. If you love me, my sweetest, kiss me once!’

But she did not.

‘Kiss me once,’ he moaned. ‘Oh, my love, do not send me away heart-broken!’

Then she stooped and kissed his lips.

‘I love you, Peggy. I have loved you always. I never loved any one but you,’ he murmured.

‘Nay, nay, Henry.’

‘I am dying, Peggy. Say you love me, my darling!’

‘Hush!’

‘I cannot hush. Say you love me, my dearest!’

‘I love you, Henry.’

Then voices drew near, and the tramping of footsteps. Succour had come. But when two gamekeepers slipped down into the old saw-pit, they found Henry Bartrop dead and Margaret Jermine lying senseless beside him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE unexpected and premature death of Henry Bartrops was deeply lamented, and half the county followed him to the grave, wondering and speculating as to how he had come by his untimely end. But no one ever knew how he had met with his accident. That, in some way, he had fallen into the old saw-pit, that in his fall he had broken his back and received other severe injuries, that Miss Jermine had found him there, that she had shrieked for aid, and that when the aid at last came—the young man's spirit had passed away, was all that any one ever knew.

Cecily's first grief was wild and passionate. In the early days of her widowhood, it seemed as if she too must have died, as if her frame could not have supported the tempest of weeping and the tumultuous sorrow to which she gave way.

'Did he say nothing? Did he send me no message?' she cried, wringing her hands.

'Dearest Cecily, he thought he was a boy again,—he told me not to frighten Mrs. Minimy,' Margaret said.

It was the first and only time in her life that she evaded the truth. But she told no one of those sacred minutes, alone with her dying lover in the saw-pit.

After a time Gladeshire resumed its usual aspect. There was another election and another member was returned to Parliament. The king is dead. Long live the king! The widow's eyes are still red, while some one—not her husband—takes the oath at Westminster. So the world goes round and round. It is an eternal law of nature that nothing makes any great difference. The grains of sand quickly fill up the hole. The returning tide makes the trodden shore smooth.

If a score of larks are killed, a score of larks' eggs are hatched, and larks' songs are heard as before. The leaves fall off the trees, and we go indoors shivering and sit by the fire, and one day the sun streams in at our lattice, and we issue forth again, and lo ! it is spring, and there are swelling buds on the oaks and ashes, and the fragrance of violets is in the air, and grass begins to grow over the grave in the churchyard, and the widow abridges her crape and takes the streaming lappets off her cap. If the world moved on in a straight line, we might expect bumps, crashes, catastrophes. But it goes round and round, and all is always the same—with a difference.

Fifteen months after Henry's death, old Mr. Dryad passed away and Regie Dryad returned to Gladeshire, after an absence of three years. Many changes had taken place among his country neighbours. The pretty Miss Homers were all married and going about sedately with children clinging to their skirts. The plain Miss Hathes had all fled and sought spheres of usefulness in English hospitals and Indian missions. Mrs. Velvetine was dead and Miss Velvetine had removed to London, whence she wrote letters and referred mysteriously to a certain person whose gender was masculine and whose attentions seemed to be pronounced. Mr. Ife had become a churchwarden and a Justice of the Peace. There was a brass in Gladestreet Church to the memory of Henry Bartropps, and at Bartropps there dwelt a pretty young lady in black and two little boys who could walk and talk.

There was less change at Ule than anywhere. Margaret entertained a little, and fulfilled her self-appointed duties as the universal Aunt Margaret with unflinching interest. She had written half a dozen more pamphlets, and she continued to lecture to the working-men, and to give pianoforte recitals to their wives, during half the year.

She was always cheerful. But she was generally grave, and she—who was not five-and-twenty—took her place among the elderly people. The world had ceased to comment upon her behaviour. In truth, it had almost forgotten that Miss Jermine had ever been a girl. But Dr. Wheble sometimes gnashed his teeth in solitude, and reviled the author of the treatise *On the Erroneousness of Love*. 'She is too great to be spoiled by adverse circumstances. But

they have left an indelible mark upon her,' he said sometimes to his nieces.

Six weeks after Regie Dryad's return, Cecily came one morning to see Margaret. The two ladies met in the old schoolroom. Margaret was dressed with scrupulous neatness, in the darkest brown, without ornaments. She was beautiful, dignified, striking. But she seemed to have put away the thought of youth and the desire for personal prettiness. Cecily, on the contrary, looked stylish. Her black dress was fashionably made, and devoid of crape. She wore a dainty hat, with a feather drooping coquettishly over her hair, and a blush-rose was fastened in her bosom.

'Haven't you brought the children, dear?' said Margaret.

'No,' replied Cecily, with a rosy blush. 'I came to talk to you about them, Margaret. Would you mind having them for a few months? I am going abroad—to Greece and Egypt, and perhaps Palestine. I couldn't take the boys, and I'd rather leave them with you than with any one else.'

'Of course,' acceded Margaret. 'I shall be delighted. Nothing could please me more.'

'I may be away some time,' said Cecily.

'When are you going?' asked Margaret.

'In the middle of October.'

'And with whom, dear?'

'Oh, Margaret, can't you guess?'

'Well?' said Margaret.

'Oh, Margaret, don't be angry with me! I did say *no* at first.'

'Angry with you, Cecily! How could I be? I don't even know what you have done.'

'But can't you guess, darling? I was afraid you'd be horrified. But I really couldn't help it. He is so sweet and kind and he has been so awfully constant, and he does love me so, and I'm so lonely sometimes.'

And the little widow began to cry.

'I thought you'd have sympathised,' she sobbed.

'But you haven't told me,' said Margaret.

'But I thought you'd have guessed,' said Cecily. 'I—I—Regie—Regie has *insisted* on my being engaged to him.'

'I am glad,' said Margaret, after a moment's pause.

'Are you sure you're not fearfully shocked, Margaret?'

'N—no.'

'You are. I know you are. But oh, Margaret, what was I to do? You don't know how Regie went on. He loves me like anything.'

'And do you love him, Cecily?'

'Why, yes! I always was fond of him, and I really couldn't help it now, after he's been such a miracle of constancy. It's not every man who'll marry a widow, you know. And he *is* so nice, Margaret. And as famous as possible—quite a tremendous poet! You know, he really has paid me a compliment.'

'And what do your father and Mrs. St. Roque say?'

'Oh, they are quite pleased. It only happened yesterday. Regie talked about it all the afternoon, and I did say *no* at first, Margaret. But he went on and on, and at last I thought it was wicked to disappoint the poor dear fellow. And I can't help being awfully fond of him you know. It was only you I was afraid about. I was so afraid you'd think I oughtn't to marry again, or that I'd forgotten my poor Henry. It's not that, Margaret. I loved Henry with all my might, and I dare say I shall never love Regie quite as much. But—but—I'm so young, and we were married such a short time!' she ended, piteously.

She began to cry again, and Margaret kissed her.

'Indeed, I am very glad, dear,' she said.

So Mrs. Bartropps became Mrs. Dryad, and as she and her husband are nearly always in London or abroad, little Henry and Jermine Bartropps live principally at Ule and are being brought up by Miss Jermine. Margaret loves them both dearly. But she has a special tenderness for little Jermine, and people say that it is because he is to be her heir. The child, however, is the image of his father, and Dr. Wheble and Miss Ovid think privately that this is why he is dearer to Margaret than is any one else in the world.

'And what is Margaret Jermine doing?' inquires Flora Velvetine, who is on a visit to Beaulieu. 'Something bare-faced, I'll be bound! When I mentioned her to a friend of mine lately, he said—But I shouldn't like to pain you by repeating it. By and by, when all is settled—But I must not divulge secrets.'

'Margaret is all I could wish,' says Mrs. Minimy. 'I could not have endured any one else to bring up Henry's children. But she does them every justice, and I'm sure

dear Henry would be satisfied, if he could see their straight limbs and their nice, healthy skins. Margaret is one in a thousand.'

'There she comes!' cried Mrs. St. Roque, looking out of the window.

There she comes across the lawn in the sunshine, with a grave smile upon her lips. The twins are with her. Little Henry runs on, shouting gleefully. But little Jermine lingers and slips his fingers into Margaret's hand.

'Won't you run on with Henry, darling?' she says. 'There's grandmamma.'

'No,' replies the little boy. 'I'll wait for you.'

No one hears. But the three ladies at the window see Margaret stoop and kiss the child, and Flora turns away, indignant.

'I've no patience with such a display,' she says. 'Margaret Jermine is a born fool!'

THE END.

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